Weird Tales

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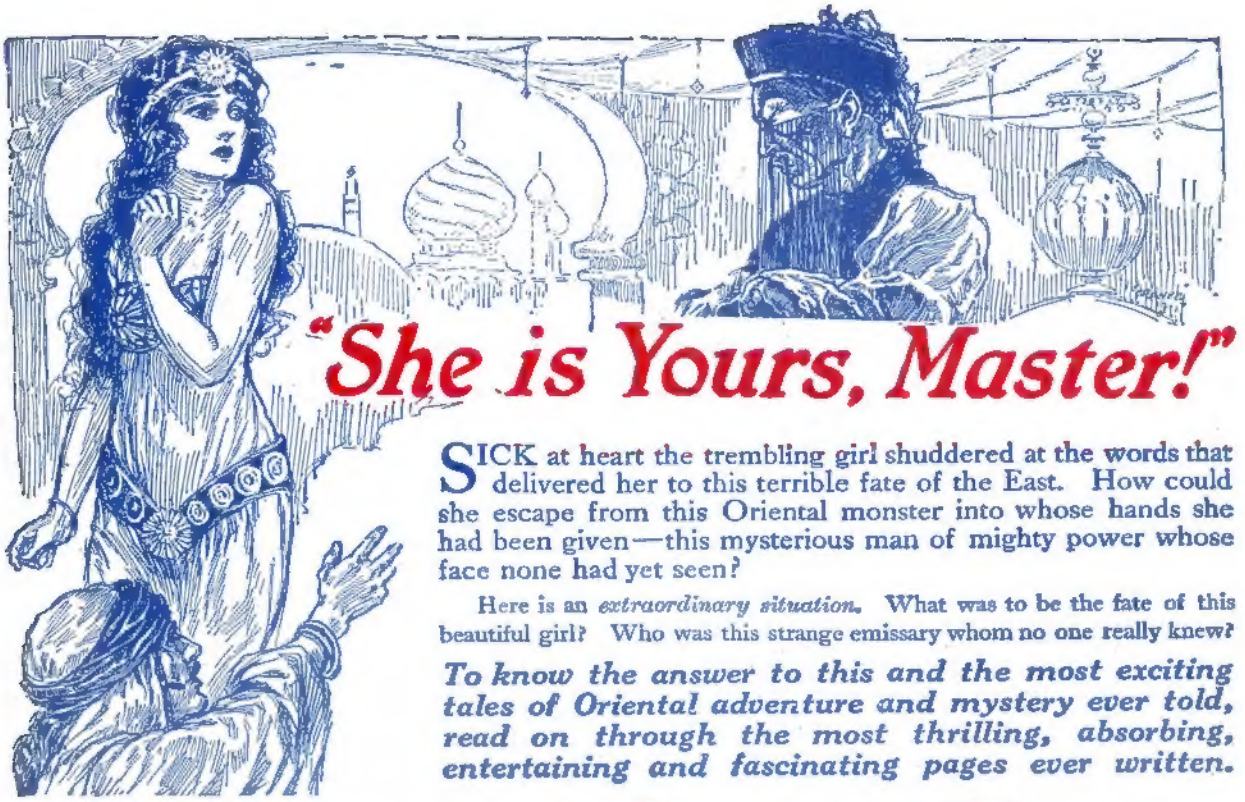
GOLDEN BLOOD
by Jack Williamson

Hugh B. Cave
Donald Wandrei
H. Warner Munn
Clark Ashton Smith



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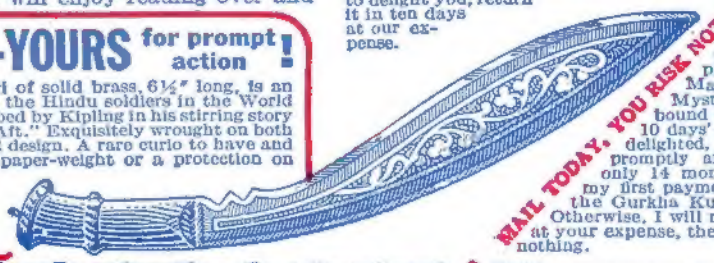

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Weird Tales

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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"She shivered when the table clattered over, and Mulvahey and Jum Peters fell into the wall."

Dead Man's Belt

By HUGH B. CAVE

A grim story of murder and the dwellers on a city dump—an unusual and striking tale

THE particular wheel of industry of which Mulvahey and Jum Peters were morose and perspiring spokes, stopped its revolutions, year in and year out, approximately one hour after sundown when the city dump got too dark to be further fruitful. At this hour Mulvahey and Jum Peters plodded wearily and intricately through the sodden ashes and tin cans and rotted papers and corroded metals to the uncouth shanty which squatted, beetle-like, at the southern extremity of the dump yards.

Here the accumulated filth of the dump proper merged reluctantly into layers of expanding black sand and ran away for ever and ever into a waste expanse of emptiness. As far as the eye could follow, this untrodden tract of bleak shadow extended until the sky fell into it. "Nuttin' lan' " Mulvahey called it, because Mulvahey had imagination. Jum Peters merely

scowled, and frowned at it and sometimes cursed it, and all the time hated it.

The dump yard was the end of the city, far beyond car-track terminals and paved road-beds. This other land was the end of everything, peopled only by scavenger dogs and sand crawlers and slate-colored rats and sometimes slinking, low-bellied cats. Jum Peters hated it because it was too near and because it was always there, never retreating, never relenting.

"Debble dark!" he cursed it. "You'm de debble hissel', jus' a-waitin' an' a-waitin' foh tuh creep up 'n' swaller wot ain' belong tuh yuh! Debble sho' 'nough is wot you is!"

The shanty was all there was. It clung to the dividing-line between Mulvahey's and Jum Peters' terrain and the "out-there" stretch of nothing-land. The shanty and all in it had been born of the dump. Mulvahey and Jum Peters and Mulvahey's woman had scraped it out of the dump yard's buried wombs and forced it together with black, callous, insensible hands.

Sheet tin, ragged on its edges and grimly streaked with red-brown rust, gripped hold of itself tenaciously and made four deformed, shapeless walls like an angular long-dead water-bug whose legs were curled under and out of sight. The roof, set atop it, was a bulging camera-shutter of the same metal, interleaved and again interleaved, where pointed contumacies stuck their jagged necks over the edge to keep watch on the disorder of muck below.

Mulvahey and Jum Peters collected the muck, day up and day down; and Mulvahey's woman sorted it. The pile of charred rags there, underneath where the window should have been but wasn't, because there were no windows—that pile of rags Mulvahey had spent the whole of yesterday getting together. Tomorrow the man with the truck would come and pay ten cents a hundred pounds for it. And the bottles. Long bottles and short, with labels on and with labels off, brown bottles and white and green and without any certain color at all. Jum Peters had put them there, after digging them out from the ashes and papers and old automobile parts and stinking ooze.

It had rained yesterday, and that had made the reclamation all the more difficult, because the rain always sucked all of the dump's slumbering stenches to the surface and made living, clutching, bottomless pitfalls out of dormant piles of gray slag. Jum Peters always cursed the rain. Mulvahey endured it but did not like it.

"Dat woman better hab somepin' good 'n' hot stewin' foh us," Jum Peters muttered now, as he groped laboriously through the deepening dusk and the uncertain stuff underfoot, toward the beetle shanty. "Ain' nuttin' much in dis heuh bag gwine get money, an' heuh I been wukkin' mos' all day t'rough. You heuh dat, Mulvahey?"

"Sho'. Cerema, she'm all right. She'm hab somepin'," grunted Mulvahey in return. The sack he was toting over his left shoulder was heavy and full of hard metal stuff that pricked into his back. It was not conducive to empty talk, although it did contain a battered tin box with the word CAKE on it in fancy letters, and that would make Cerema glad. Mulvahey could straighten out the dents in it and polish it with an oily rag and make it look as good as if it came straight from the store people. Cerema would like that, he thought.

The light was going in the shanty, and the radio was squeaking music. Mulvahey felt a brotherly love for the light. Before, it had been only candles which the dump surrendered, and sometimes the candles

were full of gritty stuff which made them sputter. Now it was an electric light bulb strung down from the tin ceiling on a length of yellow wire, and it burned steadily, like a light-house saying, "Hullc dar, nigger! Come in heuh an' get yo'sel' comfable!"

Mulvahey had made it out of twenty-six old dry cell batteries which squatted under the stove like twenty-six little men hugging themselves to keep warm. Mulvahey had made the radio, too—out of innumerable unrelated parts and bits of naked wire. "Sometimes it gits somepin' an' sometimes it ain' feelin' like gittin' nuttin'—but w'en it *does* git, it sho' is like de Lawd Gawd Hissel'!"

MULVAHEY and Jum Peters dropped their sacks outside and went in together. Cerema was standing over the stove, shaking something in an aluminum kettle. She turned with the kettle rigid in her hand and said:

"Heuh you is, huh? Mebbe sometime you-all 'll git heuh w'en yuh supper is hot, 'stead waitin' 'til it's been settin' aroun' a-waitin' on you."

The shanty inside was more of the dump yard's propagation. The floor was a club sandwich of four magic layers: on the bottom a web-work of slate, next a three-inch spread of ash siftings, then an expanse of blue-and-yellow oil-cloth with flowers creeping along its rim, and now an assortment of discarded mats, one at the threshold, two beneath the square-legged oak table, one before the single bunk, and one beside the great wooden-posted bed where Mulvahey and his woman slept. A shining gilt-framed mirror hung from the inner surface of the door, splintered only in one upper corner. On the wall near the stove was a calendar with three little girl-children leading a puppy dog somewhere on a string.

Salvage, all of it. Mulvahey and Jum Peters and Mulvahey's woman were proud of their abode.

Cerema was Mulvahey's woman. Cerema knew it and was glad of it and wanted it to be so for ever and ever until the Day of Judgment. Mulvahey and Jum Peters were brothers, and that made Cerema's chaste desires the more difficult. For when Jum Peters came home at midday, unknown to Mulvahey, to follow Cerema back and forth across the limited floor, to envelop her in his heavy arms and smother her protests with his unwanted lips and carry her squirming and kicking and fighting to the big bed—Cerema could not then tell Mulvahey.

Mulvahey, if she told him, would turn red like the outside of a tin can, and get rusty and gritty inside like the *inside* of a tin can, and scream terrible things at Jum Peters and try to kill him. He might even think, too, that Cerema *liked* Jum Peters —that she *wanted* him to come creeping back at noonday—that she was anybody's woman! And that was devil's talk.

And if Mulvahey fought Jum Peters, Jum Peters would do the killing. Because Jum Peters was big and thick-jowled and hairy, like a clump of solid inanimate black mud; and Mulvahey was different every way. Mulvahey was thin and soft and had too much temper without anywhere to hold the temper inside him.

Cerema put the food on the table without saying anything of what was in her heart. But she put the china plate in front of Mulvahey and the tin plate in front of Jum Peters, to show Jum Peters what she thought. Jum Peters had come back to the shanty this midday without saying anything to Mulvahey. And Cerema felt guilty—as if she had actually

enjoyed having Jum Peters sneak back and possess her. And she didn't.

"Lawd Gawd," she prayed, "You knows deep down in Yuh heart dat I don' wan' dat Jum Peters a-slitherin' in heuh tuh do dat tuh me. You *knows*. I is Mulvahey's woman, I *is*. *Isn't* I, Lawd Gawd?"

Mulvahey and Jum Peters ate slowly, as if they would suck the rest and peace and satisfaction out of each morsel of food before they allowed it to escape. They ate canned corn and canned beef and a thick, smelly gruel that Cerema had made out of water and broken bones and moldy cabbage leaves.

They ate noisily, with their mouths close to the table; and Cerema stood tensely beside the stove, staring at them with her eyes. Cerema's eyes were small and dark; they were the most acute accomplishments in a face too yellowish and too ill-proportioned to be pretty. Her hands fidgeted in her cotton dress, seeking a refuge where they might bury themselves and their secret. Her legs extended stiffly under her—thin, woodenish props stuck upright out of the floor, parallel with the wall. But her eyes glowed and smoldered and missed nothing.

Jum Peters, pushing his plate away and licking his mouth, said:

"Fetch dat 'baccer, you Cerema."

Cerema got tobacco from behind the stove and brought it to him. He broke it in his thick fingers and stuffed it slowly and deliberately into a metal-banded pipe with amber stem, and lighted it.

"You, Mulvahey, how much 'baccer you done got lef'?"

"I got 'nough," Mulvahey said. "Washinnun Jeffers, him a-cumin' heuh tuhnight foh tuh make talk wid me 'bout'n sellin' him dem parts f'um dem two auto'bilses out'n de dump. I got 'nough 'baccy foh giv'n him some."

"Look a-heuh, Mulvahey. I'se feelin' right fort'nate tuhnight, an' I'se bettin' dis heuh ledder bel' 'gains' youh 'baccy. Is you willin'?"

Jum Peters stood up with proud disdain and drew back the flaps of his coat, exposing an additional strip of leather encircling his middle, buckled with its glittering brass scab above the canvas belt which habitually supported his khaki lower garment.

"You-all done foun' *dat* in de dump?" Mulvahey marvelled, reaching out to take hold of it and feel its tangibility. "Dat's a gen'wine w'ite folkses bel'!"

"Ain' it?" Jum Peters grinned. "Ain' it now? Is you willin'?"

"Sho' 'nough I'se willin'! How'm us gonna bet foh it?"

"How much 'baccer you got?" Jum Peters demanded suspiciously. "Dis heuh bel' gwine tek whole lot foh bettin'."

MULVAHEY groped into his pockets and brought out his possessions. Four slabs of the black stuff he placed on the table beside his china plate, and his eyes were glued upon the gleaming buckle of Jum Peters' belt in a hypnotic stare. That buckle, even more than the belt itself, was "w'ite folkses." It glittered with the brilliancy of the sunlight on wet pieces of tin; it was full of distance and far-away places. Mulvahey could peer into it and see reflections of the lamp bulb that was hanging there above the table, almost the way he could look into Cerema's eyes sometimes and never see what was behind them. This buckle was someone else's eyes; it might even be one of God's eyes the way it shone so. Mulvahey would have bet ten times four sticks of tobacco to possess it

and wear it around him where he could stare into it whenever he wanted to.

"How'm us gonna bet foh it?" he repeated zealously.

Jum Peters fingered the belt with a cunning smile, unbinding it and placing it on the table beside the tobacco.

"Like country niggers bet down Sout'," he said. "You jus' watch."

Mulvahey watched with fixed eyes. Jum Peters expanded out of his chair and dragged two of the five torpid mats into the middle of the oil-cloth floor. He juggled them into position side by side with twelve inches of open floor between them. Then he took hold of his chair and scraped it close, and sat down.

"Git yuh stool," he ordered. "Us'm gonna set heuh an' wait, me heuh an' you dar. W'ichever's mat er wahter-bug runs acrost fust, him git de winnin's."

Mulvahey understood, and grinned. He brought his stool and sat on it beside one of the rugs. Cerema stood watching them from the stove with her bright, scintillating eyes.

"If'n Mulvahey knowed wot I knows," she thought, "him jus' wouldn' be a-settin' dar waitin' foh wahter-bugs. Him ud be fightin' wuss'n de debble hissel'."

She came forward with curious face, albeit timidly enough, and would have stood behind Mulvahey's chair to wait for the decision. It wouldn't be long, she thought. Either a rat or a water-bug, or even a big brown cockroach, would scurry across the floor as soon as the shanty became quiet. It was always like that. Silence would come creeping and seeping through the cracks in the tin walls, and lower itself like a terrible human thing through the crevices in the roof; and then there would be nothing but the hissing of her own breath when she breathed, like rodents' feet scurrying back and forth over the linoleum floor.

The thought made Cerema shudder. When it got like that in the middle of the day, and Mulvahey and Jum Peters were out in the dump where she couldn't call to them, she wanted to pick up her pots and pans and kick open the door and run and run and run and run and never come back. She was even glad then, almost, when Jum Peters sometimes came sneaking in to get her.

She thought about Jum Peters again, while she watched the two men. She began at the beginning and thought it all through to the end, and it was just the same as it always was, because the ideas were unchanging and unchangeable. She hated Jum Peters passionately. Hating him that way, she glared at him until he looked up and caught her at it.

"Git out'n heuh, you," he growled. "How'm you expec' any wahter-bugs gonna come, wid you a-standin' dar fidgitin'? Git!"

Cerema retreated unwillingly and hated him all the more intensely. She went and sat down on the edge of the big bed, and the shanty became entirely still then because neither Mulvahey nor Jum Peters spoke for a long time. They crouched forward, both of them, like men squatting on the rim of a deep hole and peering down. But Mulvahey's eyes shifted constantly and unconsciously to the shining belt buckle on the edge of the table.

After a while there were other sounds, like unseen tongues whispering to each other across the room; but they weren't tongues, they were feet. They were rats' feet, and Cerema shuddered at the sound of them. She heard them at night, every night, and they were spirits talking and muttering and threatening in the darkness. They rustled over the floor and over the bed and up the tin walls and over the tin roof; and then they were like human

fingers scratching on the cover of a coffin, trying to get in and trying to get out and all the time bemoaning their fate.

Cerema feared them because they were creatures of nocturnal hours and they were unseen. She was afraid because they were spirits of dead people, telling unintelligible secrets of far-away dreaded places where live folk could never go. Once, more than a whole year ago, she had dug up a human skull out there in the dump, and found the white, rotting bones of a young baby. . . .

Mulvahey and Jum Peters didn't seem to notice or care. They waited and waited and waited. A long, tapering, sleek gray body scuttled across the carpets between them and they sat tense and let it go. Ordinarily they would have hurled something blunt and solid at it and cursed vehemently if it got away; but now they were waiting and waiting and they feared to make a disturbance.

CEREMA'S nerves were afire. They hurt her and beat against the inside of her head like metal hammers. She wanted to stand up and talk out in a shrill voice, and she didn't dare because they would curse her, too. She heard footsteps kicking through the refuse outside, and it was Washington Jeffers coming, because no one else ever came. Washington Jeffers was the man who bought rags and bottles and chunks of metal and sometimes radio parts and automobile parts; and she wanted to tell Mulvahey that he was coming. But she didn't dare. She didn't dare move.

The water-bugs were out of their hiding-places. They came from under the tin walls and under the stove and out of the brown blankets on the big bed. One of them ran across Cerema's shoe, which was untied; and she felt its tremulous legs tickle her foot, but she didn't cry out because she was afraid to. Mulvahey and Jum Peters were sitting as if the spirits had whispered them into wood. Staring and waiting and waiting and staring.

Suddenly the stillness was cracked and shattered. It broke asunder with a booming reverberation and the rasping of Jum Peters' chair as Jum Peters lumbered up.

"You black-face skulkin' nigger, Mulvahey! You done moved a-purpose! Dat wahter-bug 'ud a-run 'crost my rug heuh if'n you hadn' moved! I'se a good min' tuh brek yuh black haid intuh fohty pieces!"

Then they were fighting because they wanted to fight. Cerema was glad and she was afraid. She was Mulvahey's woman and she wanted Mulvahey to kill Jum Peters, because she hated Jum Peters with a terrible hate. But she feared because Jum Peters was big and sinewy, and Jum Peters was impetuously and violently and hideously angry. Cerema was afraid for Mulvahey. But she was glad that there was a noise.

She stood wide-eyed on her spindle legs, with both arms reaching inflexibly back to the bed surface, holding herself up. She shivered when the table clattered over and cracked into two pieces, and Mulvahey and Jum Peters, straining in each other's arms, fell into the tin wall. The noise was too harsh and too brazen now. The roof quivered and rattled. The walls buckled and unbuckled with a crackling snap. Mulvahey and Jum Peters were grunting and sucking great gulps of breath.

They reeled erect again, and Cerema saw Jum Peters' face under the light. It was sweating and its lips were curled back exposing the broken tooth in the front of its mouth. Cerema shrank back along the bed, away from it, flattening herself against the wall. The face seemed to be glaring directly at her, as if she were to

blame. She didn't want to look at it, but she had to look; and so she cringed and stared until her eyes wouldn't close at all, even if she wanted them to.

She knew, suddenly, that Washington Jeffers was pounding on the door outside. She cried out and pointed, but Mulvahey and Jum Peters were fighting among the stuck-up legs of the table, and they were straining hard and breathing like worn-out machines, so they didn't hear her.

THE door clapped open then and Washington Jeffers came in with quick, furtive steps. He was a small, barrelly man with a big barrelly face that was very shiny and very black and had hair on it. He looked at Cerema, rigid against the tin wall, and he looked nervously, quickly, at the two men who were struggling like stiff clay animals. Then he strode into them to push them apart.

He strode into a long thick arm that was jabbing something with a sharp point at Mulvahey's neck. The sharp point entered Washington Jeffers' head until it struck against a bone; then it broke off in Jum Peters' fingers and Washington Jeffers groaned onto the floor. Jum Peters stepped backward very quickly, staring with big red-rimmed eyes at the knife-handle and the two inches of broken blade and the side of Washington Jeffers' head, where red blood was spitting like crimson water out of a suddenly punctured water-pipe.

"Lawd Gawd!" Jum Peters cried, opening his eyes wide. "I didn' go foh tuh——"

The silence was back again, and his words reeled round and round the shanty like living things of torment. They jangled back into his own ears, stabbing him. He stared fearfully again at the knife-handle and at the fountain of blood coming out of Washington Jeffers' head. Then he dropped the knife-handle as if it were white-hot and searing the flesh of his fingers. And he stared into Mulvahey's horrified face and into Cerema's awful wide eyes. And he turned and ran.

He ran out into the enveloping darkness of the dump yard. There was no sound behind him and no sound in front of him. He turned toward the unlimited expanse of Mulvahey's "nuttin' lan'," but its emptiness and graveyard gloom thrust him back with flat hands. Then he jerked about, mumbling and muttering to himself, and stumbled across the dump toward the dirt road on the other side.

And he was in a world of emptiness. There was nothing anywhere but that single needle-prick of yellow light behind him—Mulvahey's light, suspended on a wire from the tin roof and glittering out through the open door of the shanty—pointing and always pointing at him no matter which way he turned. And his feet were screaming at him, but they were underneath him and unescapable; if they had been behind him he could have run from them, but they were part of him, accusing and groaning and screeching. They sucked in and out of wet ashes; they crunched devil's talk to him.

"Blood . . . blood . . . blood!" they boomed. And they clinked into empty tin cans, jeering a singsong of mockery. "Wash*ing*ton Jeffers . . . Wash*ing*ton Jeffers!" It was the crack of that murderous knife-blade, snapping again and again and again, relentlessly.

He stumbled into black, immovable, jagged shapes that loomed up unexpectedly. His big body caromed into hard piles of twisted metal, and that made *another* voice. *"Thud.* Lawd Gawd, I didn't go foh tuh—*Thud."* The thud of Washington Jeffers' stumpy carcass striking the linoleum floor. Dead!

He was half-way across the dump yard

then. The rest of the terrain was a field of ashes. Gray ashes, soaked by the rain yesterday, squishy and gritty and so soft that his shoes sank into them; and *that* made *another* sound. "Murrrder . . . Murrrder" at every step. "Murrrder . . . Lawd Gawd, I didn't mean foh tuh——"

HE REACHED the dirt road at last and stood there, stamping his legs up and down to knock the clinging gray funereal stuff off his boots. He looked back and saw the pin-prick of light a long way off, and it terrified him because it was still glittering malevolently and still pointing. He faced toward the city—miles and miles away, where people would be talking and street-cars would be grumbling and windows would be illuminated with colored lights, and there would be hundreds and hundreds of sheltering black doorways where he could hide. And he ran.

He ran on and on until the dirt road was a paved highway with car-tracks and street lights blinking. Then, because his legs were heavy, he stopped running and stumbled along at a walk. He followed the tracks until he came to houses and sidewalks. The street lights huddled closer together. A lumbering trolley car went past him. Automobiles rolled out of the dark, stared at him accusingly with round white eyes, and droned away again. People passed him and glanced at him because his face was gaunt and sweaty and heaving up and down in torment.

He walked by two huge oil vats that were lit up with floodlights. When he passed them he cringed against an iron railing and tried to cower away from the glare. He wanted lights because the darkness clutched out for him with invisible fingers; and he wanted darkness because lights pointed into his face and screamed at him. He walked on and on. . . .

He reached the city slums. A clock on a big building said half-past nine and grinned at him. He scuffed along a dirty sidewalk and presently he opened a door that said POOL on it in red letters; and he went in and sat on a bench in the darkest corner.

He crouched there without looking up, listening to the click-click-click of little round balls hitting each other, and listening to the murmur of men's voices. For a long while he heard these sounds without looking toward them; then he lifted his head and saw four bright hanging lights over four green-topped rectangular tables which were like patches of green grass. He watched the little balls rolling on the grass and clicking into one another and rolling away again. No one bothered with him. No one came near him or spoke to him or even knew he was there.

He found courage in the four lights and in the noise of the balls. The lights were shaded on top and were not pointing at him like Mulvahey's light; and the balls weren't screeching "Blood! Murder! Wash*ing*ton Jeffers!" They were tinkling like bits of glass. They were even winking at him and whispering. "Who'm gonna know? Who'm gonna know *any*how?"

Another illusion came to him then. The balls were all alike; they were all round and the same size; they all said the same thing. Other things were alike, too. The four hanging lamps were alike, and the four tables were alike, and the men in the room were alike.

He remembered that he and Mulvahey were the same way. He and Mulvahey were brothers; they looked like each other. He was a little stronger than Mulvahey and a little heavier, but no one ever noticed *that*. No one ever went to the dump yard shanty except Washington

Jeffers, and Washington Jeffers was dead now. Who was going to know?

The idea simmered and took deeper root. The lights winked again out of one eye and said, "Sho' 'nough, Jum Peters, sho' 'nough. Who *am* gonna know, 'cept-in' Cerema?"

He considered it vaguely at first, just to think about something. The more he thought, the more the details dovetailed into each other, until all the significant points of the plan were in proper order, leading straight from the start to the conclusion.

"If'n I kills Mulvahey," he thought, "an' hides Mulvahey unner de deepes' part er de dump whar no one'm gonna ever fin' it——"

He looked up at the lights, and the lights nodded their approval.

"An' if'n I stays right in de shanty wid Cerema an' tells de p'lice w'en dey come dat *I* is Mulvahey an' dat Jum Peters done kill dat Washinnun Jeffers an' done run away——"

He listened to the clink of the balls and the murmur of voices, and they said over again: "Who'm gonna know? Who'm gonna know *any*how?"

He got up then and walked across the room and went out. While he strode along the sidewalk, back the way he had come, the conception burned up into his head and blazed out of his eyes. He began to run again. He kept running until he was far past the two illuminated oil vats.

"If'n I tells de p'lice I is Mulvahey, an' I tells dem Jum Peters done kill Wash-innun Jeffers an' run away, dey is gwine go lookin' foh Jum Peters foh ebber an' ebber. Who'm gonna know de trut'?"

Cerema would know. He thought of that. But Cerema could be easily silenced. And if he killed Mulvahey, Cerema would be his woman without dispute. He could have her and take her and live with her. There would be no need to creep back at noonday out of the dump and stifle her voice and break her supple body in his arms to subdue it. He could *own* her.

By the time he reached the car-track terminals and the end of the paved road, he had every step warily schemed. He would circle the dump like a scavenger dog, belly to the ground and eyes alert. He would make certain first that only Cerema and Mulvahey were inside the shanty. If some one else was there, he would burrow a hole in the sticky ashes and hide himself until Cerema and Mulvahey were alone. Then he would get hold of a thick, heavy, flinty wooden bludgeon and sneak up to the door and fall upon Mulvahey before Mulvahey could cry out.

Then he would tote Mulvahey's body out into the blackest, oldest, meanest part of the dump and dig a deep, deep hole under the refuse, and bury Mulvahey where not even the carrion rats would get to him. After that he would put on Mulvahey's clothes and go back to the shanty and tell the police when they came that Jum Peters had killed Washington Jeffers and run away.

This brought a new thought and a new glint to his eyes.

"If'n de p'lice ain' foun' out yit—an' mos' likely day ain'—day ain' gwine be no need foh tuh mek b'lieve I is Mul-vahey a-tall," he muttered in time to his hurrying footbeats. "Day ain' gwine *know* nuttin' foh a long time, 'til some'un tells 'em Washinnun Jeffers ain' come home. Den dey gonna come an' fin' Washinnun Jeffers daid on de flo' an' me standin' dar, an' Mulvahey gone. Dey'm gonna say tuh me, 'Whar'm Mulvahey? Who done dis killin'?' An' I'se gonna say, 'Mulvahey done dis killin' an' run

away, da's wot! An' how'm dey gonna *know?*"

That was the best plan of all, he pondered. The police would hurry out and seek Mulvahey for killing Washington Jeffers, and Mulvahey would be utterly dead and buried where they could never discover him. And after a few days, when they didn't find Mulvahey at all, they would give up and forget about it.

"Ain' likely dey gonna trubble dem-sel's 'bout'n ol' Washinnun Jeffers. Him jus' ol' nigger, da's all. Him jus' no-'coun'."

But supposing the police had already visited the shanty and found Mulvahey alive and Washington Jeffers dead? No, they wouldn't have come so soon; no one ever came to the shanty except Washington Jeffers and sometimes Washington Jeffers' little girl to bring him home at night. But still, if the police had heard the noise when he and Mulvahey had fought each other——

In that case he would have to revert to the first plan. He would have to put Mulvahey out of the way after the police had gone. Then, when the police came back, *he* would be Mulvahey. They wouldn't know, because he and Mulvahey *looked* like each other, except that Mulvahey was skinnier; and the police wouldn't notice that.

His boots sucked through soft sand now. There were no more street lights and no more sidewalk. The darkness united indefinitely with the dead extremities of the dump yard. A black, uneven, vicious anomaly of shadow merging into a jutted expanse of no-man's-land, and the metastasis was completed. A long way off the single light of the shanty blinked and winked, gutting the dark. Jum Peters groped toward it.

Now he skulked with jackal cunning along the edge of the yard. He pursued no straight, undeviating course toward the light, but with the shanty as his objective he crouched and ran from one skeletonic heap of filth to the next, darting in and out of cover, a bulging, misshapen beast on a mission of horror. Once he paused to grip a wooden cudgel, and a moment later he exchanged the cudgel in preference for a sharp-rimmed slab of corroded iron.

On hands and knees, from the end of the yard opposite the open entrance, he crawled to the shanty wall and listened. He heard Mulvahey's voice alone, and later Cerema's.

"If'n wot you'm sayin' is Gawd's trut', Cerema," Mulvahey was talking, "I'se sho' glad foh hab dat nigger run 'way. Does I know befoh, I sho' kills him daid foh playin' 'roun' someun else's 'oman. But looka heuh at dis bel' buckle! Ain' it sparkle!"

"Sho' 'nough it sparkle. I wonner does dey fin' Jum Peters, Mulvahey? If'n dey does——"

"Mo'n likely dat off'cer gits him befoh dis night'm ovuh, honey. Serve him right foh playin' 'roun' you."

Jum Peters listened and was satisfied. He edged to the doorway and groped silently to his feet. He lifted the iron truncheon high.

It was too simple, too competent. Three quick steps; the hammer thudded; Cerema screamed; Mulvahey fell. Jum Peters closed the door and said harshly: "Shut up, you Cerema, an' lissen."

Cerema retreated goggle-eyed until the side of the bed stopped her. She clung there with both hands, stiff as a stick, unable to twist her eyes from Jum Peters' advancing hulk.

"Does de p'lice come heuh yit?" Jum Peters demanded, grasping her arm. "Does dey?"

She nodded frantically. Her eyes contemplated his face with abject terror: two wide-open glittering needle-ends rimmed with white.

"Y-yes, dey done come."

"Who brung dem? *You?*"

"Not *me!* I never brung nobody!"

"Who, den?"

"Ol' Washinnun Jeffers' chile come heuh foh tuh take her pappy tuh home, an' her see Washinnun Jeffers layin' heuh daid, an' her run home an' tells. An' den a p'liceman comes heuh an' fin's out you done kill Washinnun Jeffers an' says him gwine fin' you an' goes out 'gain quick. I never bring'm!"

"You'm *my* woman f'um now on," Jum Peters said triumphantly. "Git a shubble."

"Foh—foh wot?"

"Git a shubble like I tell you! Else I gwine smash yoh haid in!"

Cerema scuttled across the room. Jum Peters went to Mulvahey's dead body and looked down at it. He scowled when he saw his belt, *his* belt with the glittering buckle, fastened around Mulvahey's middle, outside Mulvahey's black coat where every one could see it. The belt didn't fit Mulvahey anyway, and that filled Jum Peters with a peculiarly vicious satisfaction. The belt was too big for Mulvahey; the end of the strap extended four inches, four holes extra, beyond the gleaming buckle. It hung down like a mongrel's tail punctured in four places. Four inches of tail, Jum Peters thought; and he grinned bitterly.

He removed Mulvahey's clothes then and removed his own clothes and exchanged them for Mulvahey's. He fixed the belt around his new coat tenderly, and he grinned again when he noticed that the strap was not too big for *him*. There wasn't any dog's tail hanging down. There wasn't even half an inch extra leather. The belt fitted precisely. And it ought to, because it was *his* belt, not Mulvahey's.

He lifted Mulvahey's carcass over his shoulder then and strode to the door with it.

"You Cerema," he said, "you bring dat shubble. Come 'long."

He carried Mulvahey out into the dump, and Cerema walked behind him with the shovel in the crook of her elbow, with her head bent and her feet shuffling. Instinctively Jum Peters picked a path through the intricate darkness, finding a way through dormant stacks of smelly filth. Deep into the dump he intruded, selecting his route by instinctive habit until he reached the most desolate terrain of the yard. There he dropped Mulvahey's corpse on the base of a slag pile and said thickly:

"Gib dat shubble heuh, woman."

Cerema relinquished her implement sluggishly, as if she would withhold it from his eager hands as long as she could. He snatched it and worked feverishly. The sodden ashes came up in bleak, sticky clumps; the hole penetrated under the slope of the stack, deeper with every thrust of Jum Peters' boot on the heel of the spade.

He dug by the feel of it, because the hole was too black to be visible. When it was long enough and wide enough to hold Mulvahey's body with the limp legs folded underneath, and deep enough to reach the shovel handle when Jum Peters groped down to find bottom, Jum Peters ceased digging and cast the corpse into it. Then he filled the grave and scraped loose ashes over it to make it appear natural.

"F'um now on," he told Cerema, "I is Mulvahey. I isn't Jum Peters no mo'. You calls me Mulvahey an' you keeps yuh mout' shut 'bout dis heuh us jus' done. W'en dat p'lice off'cer comes back an'

asks mo' questuns, you let'm t'ink Jum Peters ain' come back no mo' ebber, an' you calls me Mulvahey jus' like I *is* Mulvahey. Does you unnerstan'?"

Cerema inclined her head fearfully. She followed him back to the shanty then, pacing after him like a woman already dead and walking to *her* grave. Jum Peters lingered on the threshold to kick the muck from his boots and replace the shovel in its accustomed place. Then he went in and sat in his own chair.

THE table was still broken in two pieces and lying on the floor with its legs extending toward the roof like a killed rat turned over on its back to expire. The two carpets were still spread together on the linoleum; but the waterbugs were not in evidence, nor were the four-legged, sleek-backed rodents from the dump. That was strange, for the shanty was quiet, almost as deathly silent as the dump yard and the fearsome swell of "nuttin' lan' " out beyond; and Washington Jeffers' carcass had been dragged against the wall and lay there like a curled-up monkey with its face hidden.

"Dat p'liceman say him a-comin' back heuh tonight?" Jum Peters demanded.

"Yes," Cerema said, "him a-comin'."

Jum Peters said: "Look heuh close at me, Cerema. Does I look like Mulvahey 'nough so dat man ain' gwine know no diff'rence?"

"I reck'n."

"Him look at Mulvahey hard-like w'en him come heuh befoh?"

"No. Him jus' as' some questuns an' go right out'n agin."

"Huh? Has I got Mulvahey's clo'es on me jus' like Mulvahey hissel' had dem on, Cerema?"

"Yes, you has."

"I'se bigger'n Mulvahey, huh?"

"Not 'nough bigger foh mek notice."

"I'se fouh bel'-holes bigger," Jum Peters grinned. "Looka heuh."

Cerema twisted her rabbit eyes toward the belt. She nodded and said nothing. Jum Peters relaxed in his chair.

For a long time after that, the shanty was *very* still, Jum Peters thought. The stillness was as thick and blodgy as if some one Big and Almighty had shoveled wet slag all over *it* and into *it* and made a grave of *it*. It couldn't be any stiller even in Mulvahey's hole. The light went dim every so often and caused curious little grays to parade across the floor in procession, like pall-bearers returning sadly from a cemetery. Jum Peters couldn't get his mind away from them and they made him fidgety and nervous. He inspected himself again and again and again to be sure that he was wearing Mulvahey's clothes just as Mulvahey had worn them.

After a while he got up and disconnected the electric light and rummaged in the wooden box behind the stove until he found a candle stump. He lighted the candle with a match, and his fingers shook. He tipped the candle and held it over the stove until the melted wax fell drip . . . drip . . . drip . . . drip . . . like the shovelfuls of filth falling into Mulvahey's gravehole. The wax made a mushy pool on the black iron, and he set the candle upright in it.

He felt more secure after that. The policeman couldn't stare at him so closely and intently without Mulvahey's accusing electric light hanging over him. The candle flame was not so terribly immutable and unflinching; it flickered and wavered and winked reassuringly like the lights in the pool parlor. It whispered the same thing: "Who'm gonna know? Who'm gonna know *anyhow*?"

He ruminated over the details again. Mulvahey's body they would never discover. The policeman wouldn't have

looked closely at Mulvahey in the excitement of uncovering a murder; therefore he wouldn't recognize any change when he returned. Cerema would keep her mouth closed; she was afraid to open it. They would search for Jum Peters until they didn't find him; then they would give up. No flaw was evident in the entire schedule. No possible flaw.

The candle sputtered. Jum Peters went to the door and looked out and went back to his chair again.

"Him a-comin'?" Cerema said tensely. "Him a-comin' heuh, Jum Peters?"

"Can' see nuttin'," he growled. "Wha's my name, woman?"

"M-Mulvahey."

"Don' you fergit dat. Speak dat name agin."

"Mulvahey," she whispered.

After that the policeman came.

THE policeman was Irish and block-shouldered and had a blunt-cornered face as fixed in its expression as the angular walls of the shanty. His blue uniform distended the doorway. He carried a night-stick in his right hand.

He peered at Cerema and glanced casually at Jum Peters. He strode into the middle of the linoleum floor.

"He ain't come back here, hey?" he demanded.

"No suh," Jum Peters said. "He ain'."

"And you got no idea at all where he might 've got to?"

"No suh. Him 'ud run 'way mos' anyw'eres 'ceptin' 'crost dat debble-lan' out'n dar."

"Yeah? Well, we ain't found no sign of him yet, but we'll get him. I'll have a look around here. Might get an idea, maybe."

Jum Peters sat stiff in his chair. Cerema stood stiff against the wooden bed end. The policeman strolled indifferently across the room.

The policeman stopped and stood quite still and looked curiously at the candle. He swung around sharply and stared at the dangling electric light bulb, and at Jum Peters. His thick-soled boots grated on the floor and grated on Jum Peters' nerves as he turned. Jum Peters stopped breathing and looked helplessly into his eyes.

"What happened to the light?" the policeman demanded.

"It—it done wen' out'n orduh, suh," Jum Peters gulped. "De wires——"

"Oh."

The policeman moved again. He peered at the stove, peered behind the stove, peered into Cerema's immobile face as he slouched past. He peered at the bed, raised the brown blankets and peered under the bed. He jerked around again. He glared at Jum Peters again.

Jum Peters licked his mouth. He tried to follow the focus of the policeman's eyes. The policeman wasn't staring into Jum Peters' *face,* but at something ***under*** Jum Peters' face. Jum Peters' head lowered itself spontaneously. His eyes dilated to their extreme magnitude. His body became all at once hard and inflexible. He knew that the policeman was intently contemplating the coruscant belt buckle which glittered on the outside of his coat.

"Where'd you get all this stuff?" the policeman said. "Out of the dump?"

"Y-yes, suh. Out'n de dum'."

The policeman glanced queerly into Jum Peters' face. Then he resumed his inspection. He walked along the tin wall, dangling his night-stick from its leather strap. He stood over the crooked body of Washington Jeffers. He studied it dispassionately. He turned again and stared at Jum Peters.

Jum Peters knew what he was staring at. He was staring at the belt buckle again. He was noticing the difference in the length of the belt. Four holes difference, and the policeman was aware of it. On Mulvahey's middle, the end of the strap had lipped down like a dog's tail with four punctures. On Jum Peters' it barely extended enough to go around.

Jum Peters tried frantically to hide it with his hands. He leaned forward in his chair and sat like a man petrified. His eyes twitched and contracted with quick spasmodic jerks. His black face turned purple and became the color of the ashes in Mulvahey's grave.

"How often did this old guy come to visit you?" the policeman said.

Jum Peters did not reply. The policeman was deceiving him, playing with him the way the carrion dogs played with the dump rats when they caught them. Jum Peters knew. The policeman knew. Jum Peters knew the policeman knew. The policeman was only waiting . . . and waiting . . . and if that wasn't true, why was he standing in the doorway to block the opening and cut off the only way of escape!

"Well," the policeman shrugged, "I'll be goin' along. I guess there ain't nothin' here."

And he went out, leaving Jum Peters sitting there.

A LONG time later, Jum Peters shifted his position and looked down at the leather belt and laughed in a cracked voice. He laughed a long time. He stared at Cerema and laughed again.

"Ain' I de bigges' fool?" he said loudly. "Ain' I, huh? All 'count'n a no-coun' ledder bel'! Huh!"

He stood up, swaggering, and closed the door and secured the latch and lit the electric light with shaky fingers. And then, in the triumphant solitude of the shanty, he stretched himself full length on the bed and stared up at the roof. Fear went out of him. He told himself there was nothing to be afraid of. Probably the policeman had come here of his own accord, on the mere chance of finding something significant to work with. Probably he wouldn't come again. No one would come at all again, ever. There would be only Cerema and himself, together, and that was what he wanted.

He looked at Cerema and she was staring at him. Her eyes were as big as empty bowls and very white. They were motionless. Everything about her was motionless, as if the full understanding of what had happened and what would happen had begun to flow into her with cosmic viscosity.

"Wha' you lookin' at?" Jum Peters demanded. "Huh? C'm heuh tuh me."

Cerema stepped backward, not forward, and stepped backward again, still staring.

"C'm heuh!" Jum Peters rasped.

"Lawd Gawd, no!"

Jum Peters looked at her and laughed. He stretched himself with the satisfied sleekness of a contented cat; he grunted animal grunts of anticipation. Presently he would get up off the bed and go to her, and pick her up in his arms and carry her back to the bed. But there was no hurry. It was good to lie and think, and know that he was quite safe and every single thing here belonged to him. The electric light was winking at him happily, and the candle had burned itself to a sputtering stump. Everything was peaceful and quiet. It was pleasant, too, to look at Cerema and watch the terror in her face, and know that she was staring back at him because she couldn't help it. It made him feel powerful and omnipotent and almighty.

He grinned when Cerema dropped

trembling to her knees in the middle of the floor. He grinned again when she flung her face toward the ceiling and raised her arms despairingly and shouted luridly in a shrill voice:

"Lawd Gawd! Lawd Gawd, sen' Mulvahey back tuh me! Sen' Mulvahey back tuh tek care er me!"

"Ain' no Lawd Gawd gwine sen' back Mulvahey," Jum Peters growled, "ner neither no one else. You'm crazy."

But Cerema heard nothing but her own cry as she knelt there with closed eyes and twitching hands uplifted.

"Lawd Gawd, sen' back Mulvahey! Lawd Gawd——"

"Looka heuh," said Jum Peters irritably, swinging his long legs off the bed and standing very straight. "Wha' foh you wan' dat insignificum Mulvahey back foh? Looka heuh 't me. Ain' I better'n dat Mulvahey?"

He stroked himself proudly, triumphantly. He was still wearing Mulvahey's clothes, and they were too small for him, so he looked even bigger in them than he was. His fingers caressed the leather belt which fitted him snugly. He looked down at it and grunted. Huh! No dog's tail hanging down on *him*. No flappy little tail with four puncture-holes in it. And that shiny buckle looked better on him than ever it had looked on Mulvahey.

"Looka heuh," Jum Peters snarled impatiently. "Ain' I wo'th lovin'? Ain' I better'n dat sawed-off Mulvahey?"

Cerema didn't look. She was rigid on the floor, on her knees, with her arms stiff as iron over her head; and she was saying over and over:

"Lawd Gawd, sen' back Mulvahey . . . sen' back Mulvahey tuh me . . ."

Jum Peters strode toward her to take her. Then he stopped and grinned, and reached up and switched off Mulvahey's light. The shanty was all at once black as a vault, and the only sound in it was the whimper of Cerema's breath and the murmur of Cerema's voice. Jum Peters stood quite still, but Cerema did not turn to see the hungry glare of his eyes or the twisting movements of his outstretched hands. Cerema was whimpering and moaning and praying . . . and the shanty was black with utter blackness. . . .

JUM PETERS drew a deep breath and took a step forward, and a sound stopped him. The sound was the creak of the door as the door opened. The door opened very slowly, and Jum Peters stared at it. And then Jum Peters became as rigid as a thing made of ice-cold metal. In the whole of him only one thing moved; his eyes opened and opened and opened, until they were boundless and protruding and stark white.

For a man stood in the doorway, and the man's face was graying black, and the man's clothing was wet and torn and loose-hanging and clotted with clinging lumps of slag. The man's arms hung lifeless at his sides; his decaying face moved not a muscle as he stared at Jum Peters with a boring, penetrating gaze of awful portent. There was about him not one semblance of life or of motion; there was everything of death and decay and decomposition. And it was strange that Jum Peters could see him at all, for the darkness inside the shanty and outside the shanty was a winding-sheet of impregnable pitch. Yet the visitant was visible, and every separate detail of him was visible. And Jum Peters stared at him, and saw, and knew that he was a creature of the night, an earth-born, returned from the far-distant pits of gloom where *everything* is night.

Straight into the room the man came, and slowly, and directly toward Jum Peters, leaving the door open behind him.

His clotted shoes made no scrape on the linoleum floor. There was no sound of breathing from his lips, no rustle from his garments. There were only his eyes and his two hands, held before him on a level with his face, with all ten fingers spread apart and seeming to grow larger and larger as they came closer to Jum Peters' protruding eyes.

Jum Peters stood like stone until all at once words bubbled from his lips.

"M-mulvahey! Don' touch me! Don' touch yoh hands tuh me! Go back tuh yoh grave-hole!"

Then he turned and ran, and ran headlong into the bed, gibbering and shrieking and moaning. With both arms outstretched on the railing of the bed, and his body pressed against the iron bars of it, he faced about again.

"Don't touch me!" he screamed.

But the figure came on and on, closer and closer, and Jum Peters' shrill voice became a cracked sob of terror. And Jum Peters stumbled away again, and tripped, and fell screaming to the floor, and scrambled up again by gripping the legs of the broken table.

"Lawd Gawd!" he shrilled, "don' come neuh me! Don' come no closer!"

He fell backward, because there was no other way to run. His big body clattered into the tin wall and quivered the shanty all around and above him. Flattened there, he stared at the approaching figure, at the hollow face and sunken eyes and wide-spread fingers, at the clotted garments and earth-blackened boots. And he could see nothing else. He could see no detail of the shanty behind that oncoming figure of undead death. Cerema was nowhere; the door was nowhere; the devil dark outside had come *inside*, inside the room, close and horrible and vicious.

"Go 'way, Mulvahey!" Jum Peters shouted. "Go back dar whar you come f'um!"

And then he fought. He fought because he had to, and because he was afraid not to. His hands lashed about, seeking a weapon. They clutched at the belt around his middle. They scraped against the glistening belt-buckle. Frantically Jum Peters whipped the belt out of its loops and seized it in his fist and laid about him with it. Whip-like, it whistled and whined through the dark, slashing again and again at the oncoming face of the man who was already dead.

And the man stopped. He stopped, and his lips curled into a smile of vague meaning as the stinging belt slapped against him. Again and again the leather lash cracked in violent contact with his sunken cheeks and never-blinking eyes. There was no sound, no faintest whisper except the whistle of the whip. There was nothing; nothing but Jum Peters' livid face and heaving chest, and the thin, vague smile on the whipped features of deathless rot.

Then, once again, the dead man stepped forward, and his smile vanished. His hands lifted slowly, convulsively; his lifeless eyes glowed with a dull sheen of luminosity, closer and closer to Jum Peters' perspiring jowls.

WITH a single great shriek Jum Peters turned and ran. He ran blindly. Headlong he stumbled into the upstuck legs of the broken table. He crashed to the floor, and his head thudded into the floor; and he lay there with a deep groan of semi-unconsciousness. And that was all.

The dead man leaned over him, and Jum Peters knew that this was so. The dead man's eyes were looking into his face and studying him intently, as if debating quietly and methodically what punish-

ment was most fit to be meted out. And Jum Peters cringed violently away from that face, and from those eyes, and from the spread fingers of those hovering hands, as he would have cringed from a figure of flame. Jum Peters groveled into the floor and clawed with frozen fingers at the slick linoleum, as if he would scratch an aperture in the very earth beneath him and so escape the horror that loomed above his twisted body.

"G-go 'way f'um me, Mulvahey!" Jum Peters sobbed. "Le' me be! Don' touch me! You'm *daid!*"

The face of the dead man altered as Jum Peters gaped into it. It became calm and peaceful and full of saisfaction, and it was smiling in a way that was not a smile at all, but a silent expression of deep understanding. And the hands reached down with motionless quickness and took from Jum Peters the leather belt which Jum Peters clasped in stiff fingers.

Jum Peters stared and saw then that the lash *had* made marks upon the dead man's features; for the marks were leering down at him in long, ugly, vicious white welts. But they were bloodless and no real marks at all; they were only scars without definite form, white and ghastly visible upon their mask of graying decay. And upon the man's head, under its mat of crawling clotted hair, gleamed another white incision, a wide and hideous gash where Jum Peters' iron bludgeon had long ago, ever and ever so long ago, struck and brought death.

Jum Peters saw this, and the dead man's lips were parted, smiling, as those groping hands took hold of the leather belt and removed it from Jum Peters' fingers. Jum Peters stared and shuddered. For the man lifted the leather belt to his mouth and drew it very slowly and deliberately over his ashen lips, touching every inch of it in a strange caress. And he pressed the buckle of it also to his lips, as if he loved it with a strange affection. And then he leaned again and replaced the belt in Jum Peters' fingers; and he stood very straight, unsmiling and expressionless.

Jum Peters peered into his face and trembled violently with the significance of it. The expressionless contour of the face lingered in Jum Peters' eyes long after the dead man had turned away and paced slowly across the floor. And there the man stopped quite still and extended his arms, and into his arms came another figure with upturned face and wide worshipping eyes and parted lips.

The man's arms folded about this other figure and drew her into their embrace, and the lips of the dead man closed over the lips of Cerema; and Cerema and the dead man moved together to the door.

Jum Peters watched them, and into Jum Peters' eyes came swift and sudden horror. For he saw that Cerema, too, as she clung to the man's clotted body, became visible in the dark even as he was. A strange light, which was no light at all but merely a glow of life-in-death, swept from his form into hers and emanated anew from her, enveloping her and making of her a macabre, unreal woman. She clung desperately to her lover, and his arm was tight about her waist; and together they passed over the threshold into the outer darkness.

Jum Peters saw them, and crawled on hands and legs to the doorway, and lay there, watching. He saw them walk together across the dump and into the gloom of that vague, uninhabited terrain of devil dark which extended beyond. Side by side they walked; and they were the only visible moving things in a well of utter blackness; and they became smaller and smaller in the distance . . . and

never once turned to look back . . . and so vanished, together, into the night.

Jum Peters stared and stared and stared. And presently a great horror welled into his soul, and he fell flat upon his face on the floor, with his hands clawing the threshold.

And darkness came over him as he lay there.

THE darkness was gone when he awoke from it. Through the open door of the shanty streamed a shaft of burning yellow sunlight, making gold ingots of the upturned table and the stove and the metal posts of the bed. Jum Peters groped unsteadily to his feet and pushed one hand through his tangled hair, and rubbed his eyes. He peered all about him in mute bewilderment, and he said aloud:

"I bin dreamin'. Ain' nuttin' like dat evuh *really* happen!"

But he saw something as he stared; and he strode quickly across the floor and stood over it. It was dead, and it was Cerema. And she lay on her back, with here face upturned to the roof and her hands flung out on the floor above her head, and her knees doubled beneath her, as if she had fallen backward from a kneeling position, and died that way.

Jum Peters gaped down at her and reached down to touch her. He drew his hand away very quickly and stepped backward without taking his gaze from her face. He did not understand it, because Cerema's face was happy and smiling and full of God's glory, and yet Cerema was dead. And certainly Cerema had died from fright and fear.

"Huh," Jum Peters grunted, and the grunt was a whisper. "Her allus wus queer. Her ain' no ord'nary woman."

But he knew he had been dreaming about the other thing, and he was not afraid any more, because the shanty was not dark. He strode to the stove and looked into the aluminum pot which stood there. Then he set about making a fire, because he was hungry. He went in and out of the shanty many times, gathering wood and papers and breathing great gulps of sunlight; and presently he kicked something and looked down and grunted. Then he leaned over and picked up the leather belt that lay there on the threshold, and he looked at it, frowning.

"I sho' 'nough must er been dreamin'!" he marveled. "Looks like I must er been runnin' roun' an' ravin'. Else how come dis bel' layin' heuh?"

But he slipped the belt through the loops of his khaki trousers and buckled it, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Ain' gwine worry 'bout'n *dat*," he said.

He caressed the belt lovingly and examined it.

"Ain' no dog's tail hangin' down on *me*," he grinned. "Ain' no tail wid fouh peep-holes in ut, danglin' down. *I* ain' Mulvahey."

He was satisfied then. He made a fire and ate the stew in the pot when it was hot, and then he glanced at Cerema and said, musingly:

"Cain't leave *dat* heuh. Ain' no udder woman gwine lib heuh wid me while dat'm hangin' 'roun'."

He lifted Cerema's body to his shoulders, and found the shovel, and carried Cerema out into the dump. While he picked his way carefully through the piles of refuse, with Cerema's legs clasped like clay sticks in his arm and Cerema's head and arms dangling down his back, he thought of something else and said aloud:

"Huh. I'se gwine mek suah ob *dat*. Ain' gwine hab no mo' dreams like dat 'un."

He took Cerema to the place where he

had buried Mulvahey's dead body, and he dug there with the shovel. He dug until the blade of the shovel struck something soft and spongy, and then he climbed down in the hole and clawed with his hands. And then he stared for a moment into the face of the corpse, which was Mulvahey's face; and he said aloud, with relief:

"Huh. I knowed *dat.*"

He climbed out again and tossed Cerema's body in on top of the other one, and filled in the hole. Then, with the shovel over his shoulder, he stumbled back to the shanty and closed the door and lay on the bed.

"Affer dis all ovuh fo' good," he told himself, "I'se gwine git me a woman foh tuh lib heuh wid me. Didn' cayuh nuttin' foh dat Cerema nohow. Ise gwine git me someun better'n *her.*"

He stretched himself and thought about it, and grinned with thinking about it. He looked up at the ceiling and felt very strong and powerful.

"I'se Gawd," he grinned. "Dat's who I is."

And he looked at himself and thought so. He stretched himself and gazed proudly at the leather belt around his middle. He thought about the dog's tail with the four holes, and he sneered. There was no dog's tail on him! He polished the buckle with his sleeve, and caressed the leather, and lay back, thinking. He thought about Washington Jeffers and the policeman and Mulvahey and Cerema; and he said, lazily:

"Who'm gonna know?"

He lay very still, breathing deeply; and he shut his eyes and thought about having another woman in the shanty, to live with him. He told himself the other woman would be better than Cerema, and there would be no Mulvahey to interfere.

"Bein' as I'se Gawd," he said thoughtfully, "I c'n git me de bestes' woman dey is, foh muhsel'."

SO HE dozed, and presently, vaguely, he was aware that his stomach hurt him. His stomach ached. He put his hands on it and pressed, and said aloud:

"Dat stew done dat. Cerema wa'n' no good cook nohow."

He drew a deep breath, and his stomach hurt more instead of less. He looked down and saw that his middle had swollen a little, and the belt was too tight around it. That was what hurt him. Scowling, he took the belt buckle in his hands and pulled it to loosen it; but it was stuck and wouldn't loosen. And suddenly he let it go and cried out shrilly:

"It moved! Lawd Gawd, it moved!"

Fear came to him then, and he stared with bulging eyes at the belt. He sat up, squirming against the bed post. With both hands he took hold of the belt and the belt buckle and strove mightily, desperately, to drag one through the other. He struggled until his hands were drenched with sweat and his face was a bloated reddish thing and his breath came in great gulps of agony. And when he took his hands away from the belt and stared down, he saw that the leather strap had wriggled through the gleaming buckle, and one hole was showing. A dog's tail with one puncture was dangling down.

Screaming, he twisted off the bed and stood erect, fighting at the encircling strap. He tore his fingers and wrists on the sharp edges of the buckle; he burned his hands on the leather. With huge eyes he glared at the belt, and his chest heaved up and down in mighty gasps, and mumbling sounds choked through his lips. A terrible pain was searing upward through

his stomach and downward through his legs. He was on fire all over and inside, and he screeched with the agony of it.

And when he looked again, the belt had wriggled through the buckle another notch, and two holes were showing. A dog's tail with two punctures was dangling down.

He knew the meaning of horror then. He threw himself onto the bed, face down, and gripped the edge of the straw mattress with both hands extended, and pressed his body deep into it, striving to make himself smaller around the middle. He held his breath until his throat was full of whistling noises. He buried his eyes and nose and mouth in the unclean blankets and sucked the flannel with his lips. He clawed and scratched with his fingers. He beat the floor with his dangling feet.

He felt, he *knew*, that the leather band around his stomach was tightening. Tightening slowly, viciously, relentlessly.

Mad with the knowledge of it, he pushed himself violently off the bed and lurched into the middle of the room, where the upturned legs of the broken table stopped him. He hurled himself across the upstuck sticks of wood, sawing his body back and forth in frenzied desperation, striving to tear the leather in twain by chafing it. And all the time, as he twisted and writhed at his task, horrible sobs gurgled out of his mouth, and his eyes protruded, and his tongue grew thick and bloated in his teeth.

And he saw, looking down in his madness, that the leather strap had wriggled another notch through the gleaming buckle, and there was now a dog's tail dangling with *three* punctures. A terrible agony surged up through him, eating into his hands and legs and head and feet, driving reason out of his mind.

Screeching hideously, he staggered backward. His hands were clutching again at the belt, but they could find no hold, for the leather strap was a band of iron, cutting into the flesh of his stomach. It was wriggling into itself, closing itself tenaciously, and he could feel its movements. Momentarily he stood stock-still, glaring down at it. Then he looked about wildly for a knife, and there was no knife.

He shrieked again and again. He fought himself. He clawed at himself, at his face and breast and legs. He stumbled about the room, knowing only that he could not stand still. He crashed headlong into the tin wall and filled the shanty with the jangling vibrations of quivering metal. His voice rose higher and higher to a knife-like screech. He fell to the floor, rolling over and over. He clawed at the linoleum. He twisted on himself, writhing with the mad convulsions of a broken snake. He sobbed . . . and sobbed . . . and sobbed. . . .

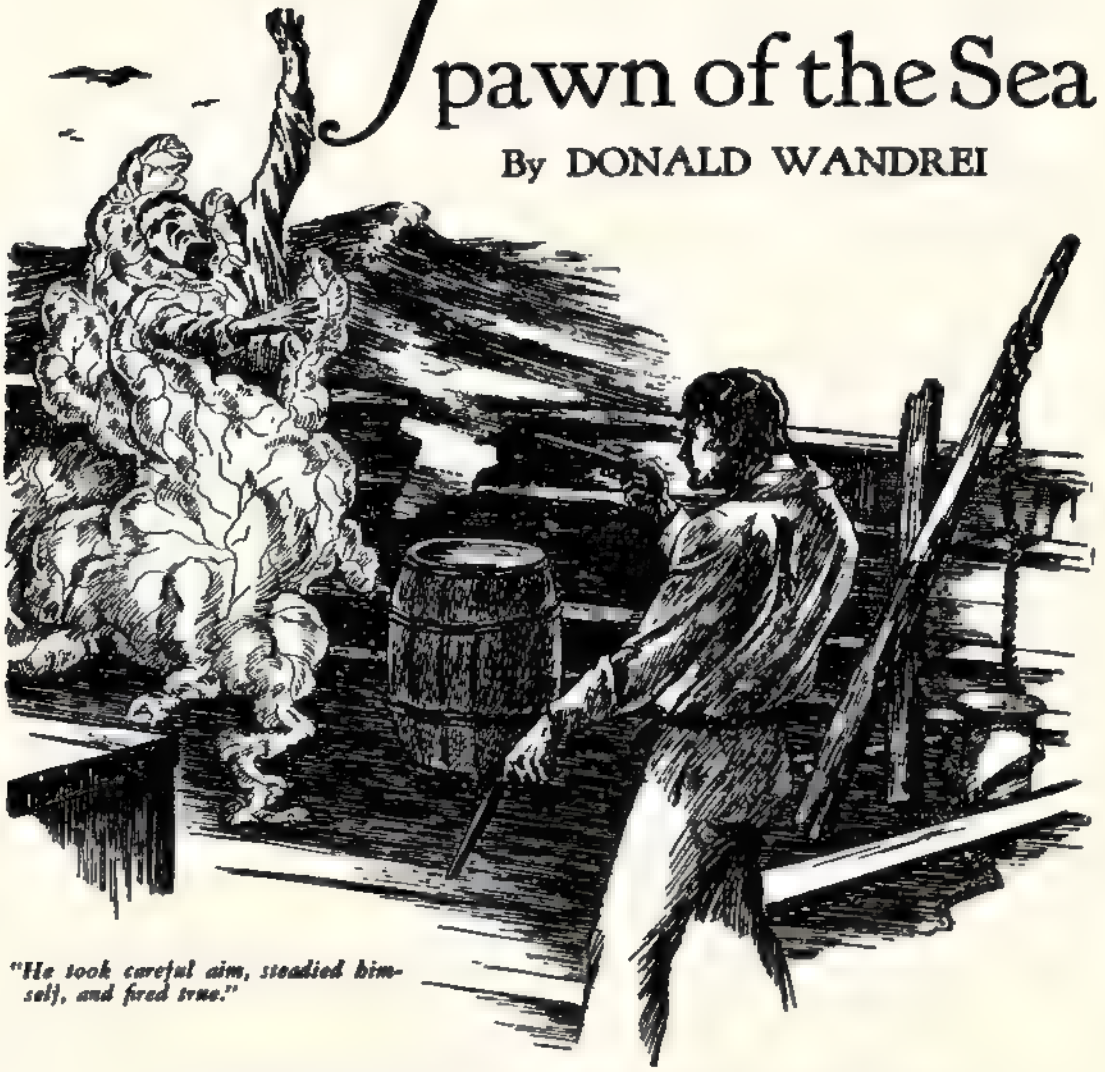
And suddenly he was very stiff and still, and his sobs ceased.

He was dead, and his outflung hands were locked in the smooth floor, with their fingernails buried from sight. His eyes were out of his head and his tongue filled his gaping mouth. His body was a rigid, twisted, swollen mockery, shapeless and hideous. There was absolutely no movement about him. Even the leather belt had stopped its wriggling.

The leather belt was a stiff band, sunk deep in the bloated flesh of his body. The buckle of it gleamed up at the ceiling, glittering and grinning. And the protruding end of the strap, like a dog's tail with four tiny incisions, hung limp and lifeless to the floor, with four empty holes gaping in it.

Spawn of the Sea

By DONALD WANDREI



"He took careful aim, steadied himself, and fired true."

An amazing story of a weird voyage, with a frightful sea-beast, spawned out of slime and darkness, as cargo

TOM GORDON had never paid any undue attention to the bottle until the moment he stumbled and knocked it from its shelf to shatter upon the floor, but from that instant his interest became prodigious.

Tom had been making a comfortable income from his gift shop for several years. He made a specialty of odd things —Oriental jewelry, antique terra-cotta figurines, illuminated parchment leaves, African sculptures, old Java batiks, and a thousand other things that were both unusual and artistic.

Every summer, during the slack season, he went abroad for a month or so and wandered from place to place purchasing as he went whatever odds and ends appealed to him. The bottle was one of the acquisitions of his most recent trip. It came to his attention when he was idling on the shore of Fezd-El-Tuah one

morning and saw an Arab urchin playing with it. Tom wanted the bottle because it was obviously the craftsmanship of a bygone century. It looked something like a decanter, something like a Greek amphora, and was perfectly blown, with a long, slender neck and a gracefully rounded base. At one time it must have been buried, for stains and iridescent colors made even more opaque its original coloring of brown. It was stoppered and sealed with wax that had partly weathered away but still seemed almost as hard as stone.

Tom bargained with the shrewd gamin and finally obtained the bottle for the equivalent of fifteen cents. His Arabic was as poor as the lad's French, so that the two had difficulty in understanding each other. All that Tom discovered about the history of the curious bottle was that the urchin had recently found it half buried in the sand.

The bottle made its way back to America with the rest of Tom's purchases, and in due time was placed upon a shelf. No one priced it during the months it stood there, but Tom didn't mind, since he had bought it primarily to add a touch of atmosphere to his shop. And on the shelf it remained, half forgotten, until the accident that destroyed it.

Tom had little opportunity to regret his loss. His annoyance vanished when he saw the yellowed paper lying among bits of broken glass. Despite its apparent age, the paper was still strong and covered with quaint, fine script, though the writing on the outer leaf had faded for the most part to illegibility.

He took the tightly rolled manuscript home with him that night with as considerable interest as he had ever had in any of his purchases; and the dawn of another day was breaking before he had fully deciphered it and transcribed it into modern English. Most of the first page was hopelessly dimmed; he could make nothing of the superscription; and even the date was ambiguous. He deciphered a "17" but whether the year intended was "17—" or "—17" it was impossible to decide. Tantalized by the unreadable introduction, he eventually proceeded with the body of a manuscript that was in many ways even more tantalizing; and the hours flew by with never a thought from him as he pored over the script. To be sure, he grasped an occasional word on the outer leaf whose writing had been largely effaced by the action of sunlight, but nothing like a continuous narrative became possible until he turned to the second page, which began in the middle of a sentence.

"——day out the storm broke. We passengers were all ordered below deck while the crew raced above hauling in sail and trying to save the ship.

"May God's grace protect the seven seas from another such gale. Out of a sooty sky the rain lashed in torrents, the wind screamed through the rigging, and the vastest waves that ever were boiled up around us. The ship lurched and tipped as though any minute it would turn over or sink, and not one of us but was bruised from head to foot after an hour of wild pitching to and fro. The women, poor things, were all the more terrified, for it was dangerous to risk lighting the lamps; so we huddled in the dark and could hardly hear the shouting of the crew above the terrible uproar, what with the waves pounding, and thunder crashing, and the wind howling in a kind of fury. But besides these, we heard ominous cracks, and heavy objects smash across the decks; yet we knew not what went on up there.

"There was little food to be found, and that little of course went to the women

and children. The rest of us did what we could to tie them and ourselves to anything solid, or brace ourselves against sudden lurches. We got no sleep, neither did we talk, such was the fear upon us.

"Many hours passed with the ship staggering and thus being battered; yet I knew not at what time God's wrath descended. There was a long, sickening slide of the ship, a groaning and bursting of timbers, and then a sudden deafening crash. We heard running feet, and next the panic caught us, poor devils, for the hatches were unbattened and a voice roared down that the ship was sinking.

"All was noise and confusion, the air a sound and frenzy, every one bawling and struggling and fighting to get out, only a few of us remembering that we were gentlemen, such was the terror. Up on deck we found the wildest disorder, two of the masts down, the other sail blown to tatters, and one of the boats squarely smashed. The crew were desperately trying to launch the seaworthy boats, but another was wrecked before it got clear. By the glare of lightning we saw the awful scene. The captain, God have mercy on his soul, stood by his post. He ordered the passengers off first. Gun in either hand, he shot down the cowards who tried to save themselves by leaving the women behind.

"I hastened toward the boat nearest me. That is the last I remembered save of hearing a sharp crack and receiving from behind a blow on my head. Pain numbed my limbs as total blackness blotted out the scene.

"For a very long time I must have lost my senses. I awakened with a throbbing headache and a thirst. I opened my eyes to the glare of sun. The sea was like a sapphire, smooth and motionless and bright as far as I could see, and no land anywhere.

"When I attempted to rise, my head throbbed so fiercely that I fell back. I felt it and discovered a swelling, with dried blood already caked into a scab, by which I judged that I must have lain unconscious for at least two days. I was weak, the pangs of hunger assailed me, and an intolerable thirst parched my mouth. With difficulty I finally dragged myself to a clogged scupper that retained some warm, dirty rain-water and drank it in gulps.

"Feeling considerably refreshed, I rested until my headache had subsided, then cautiously arose. I was still weak, but I needed to know the best—or the worst—about my predicament.

"The deck was swept clean of every movable object, and the framework itself wrecked in places. Besides listing, the ship hung low. I surmised that it had sprung a leak or shipped a quantity of water. Not another soul appeared to be aboard.

"I made my way to a hatch and descended into gloom. The matches in my pocket were useless from having been soaked in the storm. I am no sailor, and knew little about the nature of ships, but I was acquainted with the general plan of this one and sloshed through a couple of inches of water to the galley. Long fumbling around in darkness was finally rewarded by the discovery of dry matches, one of which I promptly used to light a lamp. I satisfied my hunger with the first leftovers that came to hand—stale bread, a piece of salt cod, and some raw potatoes, washed down with a draft of English whisky that refreshed me greatly.

"I then set out to examine the ship. In the passengers' quarters I found three corpses, which I heaved overboard after brief prayers for the repose of their souls.

I found two more bodies in the crew's quarters. And I discovered one living man.

"He must have been among those shot by the captain for disobeying the command to let the women and children escape first, and had crawled below later; for I came upon him hanging from a berth. At any rate, a ball had pierced his thigh and gone clean through. He suffered much from loss of blood, had a fever, and was delirious when I discovered him. But if gangrene did not set in, he had a fair chance to recover. I did what I could for him, glad of any companionship, even though it might not be of the best, and devoutly prayed that he would live. Whether the other passengers and the crew had taken to the boats or been claimed by the sea, I do not know. There was no one else aboard, and I can scarcely believe that anything human could have survived so terrific a storm.

"I next went over the remainder of the ship. The hold had filled with an amount of water that I considered dangerous, and I wondered how much longer the ship would last. I could not determine if it had sprung a leak and was still settling toward its grave, or if it had shipped an extraordinary amount of water in the gale. The hold was an evil-smelling place where the cargo had shifted and some boxes broken open, the others likewise being or becoming waterlogged. I do not know what the cargo was, but from as much as I could see of the shattered boxes, it appeared to consist equally of a greenish powder which I judged to be some chemical, a whitish salt that I also could not identify, a gummy, malodorous substance, and boxes simply marked 'seeds,' none of these latter being broken.

"My search then took me to the captain's quarters, which were a bitter disappointment. I hunted everywhere, but the ship's log was gone, including the sailing-chart. There were other maps and papers, but not a scrap that would indicate our position, even as it was at the height of the storm. Most of the instruments were hopelessly damaged and useless except to some one who might know how to repair them.

"In the galley I found a great many barrels of salt pork, salt cod, flour, potatoes, various condiments, five tubs of pickles, much liquor, and varying amounts of corn, nuts, rice, coconuts, venison, and so on, together with about two dozen live geese, chickens, and turkeys. Altogether there were ample provisions, upon which two men could subsist for many months, possibly a year even. The supply of fresh water was low, but I collected about two barrels more in different parts of the ship which retained rain-water from the recent blow.

"At intervals I ministered to the sick man. Toward evening he began to improve. A couple of days later, the fever left him and he thereafter grew rapidly better.

"I CAN not convey the loneliness of the next month, and it would be idle to make the attempt. Bill—his full name was William Gehrety—and I wore out our eyes peering vainly for sails that never came, and land that we could not find. We had no conception of where we were, since the ship might have been blown hundreds of miles off her course during the gale. According to the last reckoning he had heard, we were approximately nine hundred miles from the nearest known land. Nine hundred? It might as well have been nine thousand. Yet we continued to hope, even though we knew we were far off the trade route which, God knows, was travelled by no more than three or four ships a year, in

this sea remote from the Americas, and farther still from England.

"We spent weary days building a crude boat, calked it with tar, rigged out a clumsy sail, and tested it. I doubt whether a craft was ever more unseaworthy. We hadn't the heart to go to certain death in it, for it wouldn't steer true, it pitched crazily, and we couldn't put into it a fraction of the water and provisions that we would need. We learned much by this experience, but we were also discouraged. Nevertheless, disheartened by the alternatives of eventual starvation on our prison, or certain death by sea, we set to work slowly erecting a more substantial boat.

"So the days went by, and the sun shone in deep blue skies, and the water lapped softly against the sides, and at night the stars came out brilliantly except when the moon rode high. Yet never a sail hove in sight, and though we probably drifted with currents, there was nothing to tell us how rapidly, and we saw no land. By ourselves, we could not repair and raise and rig a mast large enough to do us any good, for the season of calms had come, and since what canvas we had was too small for any benefit short of a stiff blow, we saved it for our boat.

"There was furthermore around the ship a bad smell that got on our nerves. It became stronger as the days passed until we determined to investigate its source. We traced it to the hold. We tried bailing the water out but the stench was so sickening that we were compelled to cease. The water in the hold was queer stuff, unusually warm, thick and slimy and a pale green in color. The cargo had evidently gone bad, or the chemicals, if that's what they were, caused the smell. We decided that the odor would dissipate in time, but it was so bad below that we took to sleeping on deck and going down only for our meals.

"There were strange noises that also bothered us: not the usual creakings and strainings of an old ship, but something we couldn't quite place. We used to hear it, as though down in the hold, or far away, a stirring as of some one awakening and a simmer like water coming to a boil.

"The smell didn't vanish. It got worse, until even though it wasn't so bad in the daytime on deck, at night when we slept it seeped up and polluted the air. We tried closing the hatches but it did no good. Then it got into the food, and we not only had to smell the stench but taste it.

"I don't know when the combination of curious sounds and horrible odors became too much for our nerves. I think it was the forty-third day of our drifting, but it doesn't matter. All the preceding night, the stink had hung heavily like a smoke cloud, and the strange noise, almost like that of a heart, became a rhythmic pulse as the night wore on. I at first believed my nerves were beginning to give way, but since Bill had had the same impressions, I thought we couldn't both be wrong. Somehow, I felt uneasy. The monotony and solitude were bad enough. Now we had a rotten miasma and a singular noise to contend with besides.

"That morning we decided to make another investigation of the hold. Since we knew that the smell came from there, we suspected that the noises might have some connection with it. Perhaps a fermentation was going on. If worst came to worst, we might as well devote our time to carrying the bilge out or heaving the boxes and cargo overboard. I myself was rather sure that they were responsible for both the bad smell and the queer sounds.

"GOING below was like walking into salt water, the odor was that strong, pushing and holding us back, a nauseating odor, filthy, abominable, and beast-like. I think I was faint when we reached the hold, for I can not otherwise quite account for what happened. Bill was carrying a lighted candle while I unbattened the hatch and looked in.

" 'Shut it! *Shut it!*' Bill screamed, and we hurled ourselves against the door, fastening it securely. Down in the hold we had seen a vast, shapeless mass of undulating greenish-white stuff, thick as skin, with a beating motion like a pulse. The revolting odor came from that mass, but what terrified us most was the way that pulpy substance leaped up at us when we opened the hatch! Leaped, like an unknown animal after prey, with a furious beating of the pulse, its surface writhing into tentacles that flung at us, and a hiss like an inarticulate cry.

"The candle went out when Bill jumped. Darkness dropped upon us like a shroud. We heard the thing undulating in the hold, and pounding against the hatch. Would the barrier hold? Or was the noise only that odd pulse beating? Or the hammering of our own hearts?

"Panic caught us. We dashed for the other hatchways and fought to get out. Once on deck, we felt a bit ashamed, with the morning sun shining hotly. We looked at each other, white and shaken, for all that. Then a wave of corruption eddied around us, and we knew it came from the thing in the hold.

"Tacitly, we avoided reference to the incident and made no further attempt to investigate. Who can say what we saw, or whether we really saw? Yet I was convinced that a sea-change had somehow come over the cargo, that a slow and abnormal and utterly loathsome transformation was taking place. How else account for it? The salt sea-water and the hot sun must have combined with the seeds and chemicals to germinate a hideous, perhaps unknown, form of life, down in the hold. Life? Not as I knew it, but something that was strangely and dreadfully alive.

"All that day we toiled, bringing food from the galley and stowing it on deck near the stump of the foremast. Every descent was a trip of unexpressed fear, for we could hear a distant heaving in the hold; but by nightfall we had carried everything that we would need above. Nothing could have persuaded us to leave the deck again. We battened the hatches and calked all places where the storm had smashed openings in the deck.

"It must have been long after sunset before our labors were ended. It is not strange, therefore, that when we retired, I quickly fell asleep, worn out from my exertions, despite the tension of peril that hung around, and the persistent throb which crept up from below, and the moldy reek that poisoned every breath I drew.

"I woke with a start, to hear a pulsing throb that made the whole ship quiver. But what brought me leaping to my feet in rage was the sight of Bill stealthily lowering himself over the side. The coward had filled our first crude boat with provisions and water. He was trying to steal away with our only means of escape, leaving me who had saved his life behind to face death and terror alone.

"I MIGHT have killed him, but I didn't. He was unprotected because he was lowering himself with both hands. I whipped out my pistol and had him covered before he could scramble back. He didn't risk dropping to the sea; for he knew that I could have and would have shot him before he could pull out of

range. I made him haul back every scrap of food, and hoist the boat, after I had disarmed him. Then I tied him securely and went back to sleep. I knew he would be dangerous from now on, but I also knew he would be unnerved by that hellish pulse which sounded from the ship's hold and the commotion the shapeless thing made, and the stench that hung thicker than ever.

"Existence became a nightmare. I had long abandoned hope of rescue. The only recourse left was to finish the larger boat on which we were laboring, and trust that we made land. The stench on deck was horrible, and at night I heard that damnable pounding that became steadily more insistent. What if the thing broke out? I trembled at thought of the consequences. And now I had to watch Bill every second. His aid was essential to finishing the boat, but the rat would kill me and flee the minute that he received the opportunity. Each long second I was under the greatest strain, listening to that maddening beat, watching the moves that Bill made, and always faint with the putrescence which assailed my nostrils. Yet I toiled as strenuously as Bill to finish our boat. And as if all this was not disaster enough, the food began to spoil, under the hot rays of the sun. The pork and cod became wormy. The venison dried out until it was tough as leather. Hardtack, pickles, potatoes, and nuts were about all we had left, except the flour that we occasionally made into soggy bread over a carefully guarded fire and munched without appetite.

"At night I trussed Bill up and obtained what fitful sleep I could. At morning I released him and kept a hawk-like watch over his movements while we sweated over the boat. He didn't say much. He was sullen, and by the wicked look in his eyes I knew he was still planning to escape.

"All through the night he would talk and mumble and try to keep me awake.

" 'You can't do this!' he would plead when the distant pounding became loud. 'What if that beast gets out? You'd run away and I'd get killed. It ain't fair. Damn you, take these ropes off—I won't try to escape,' on and on he would go until he fell asleep or I did.

"To make sure that he wouldn't try deserting again, I insisted on dismantling our first boat so that we could use the planks on our second one and progress faster. It took the heart out of him when he saw his way of escape disappear under his eyes, but I imagined he would work more willingly thereafter on the other boat. I realize now what a foolish action of mine that was, for I ought to have kept a means of escape in constant readiness. Bill suggested time after time that we draw lots to see who should win the first boat and take a chance on reaching land. I wouldn't listen to him. I felt in a way responsible for him, and I was determined that we would live or die together.

"Any one calamity would have been disheartening, and I had three battles to fight: the silent hostility of Bill, the eternal sea itself, and now this living creature that dwelt in the hold. Bill claimed that the thing was some sort of sea-monster that had been washed aboard during the storm and had kept on growing. I said and I still think that it was a fearful product of heat, seeds, and chemical action occurring in saline water, but no matter how rational our explanations were, they didn't help us keep a grip on ourselves. I remembered all too vividly that gluey, greenish mass quivering foully with a sub-human, less, and yet more, than animal life, and the hid-

eously purposeful fashion in which it contracted and leaped at us.

"We raced against time trying to finish a seaworthy boat for our escape. It would have been an arduous task anywhere, even with adequate materials. Our nerves were ragged, our tools were inferior, and we had to employ any plank we could lay our hands on. It was a hopeless race from the beginning, and we knew it; but at any rate it kept us from brooding over our plight, and a kind of madness drove us on, to the heat of a tropical sun and the interminable sound of a heart beating with monotonous regularity.

"For three days we lived in a wretched hell. By the forty-sixth day, the far-away throb had swelled to a thud that was weirdly alive, louder than the faint lapping of waves or the blood that coursed in my temples. At night it fairly drove us wild. We listened to it with a sort of dreadful fascination, hardly conscious that for hours our movements had been rhythmically actuated by its tempo.

"I DIDN'T sleep well, and I didn't sleep long after we turned in, that evening. I dozed a bit, only to wake from insane dreams to insane reality, and then doze again while that accursed heart beat steadily. I came to a sudden, terrified wakening when a heavy crash drowned out the sound. Bill screamed and I leaped over to him, freeing his bonds at a slash. Together we crouched in the darkness, listening.

"A sucky gurgling came from down in the hold, we heard a commotion as of oil bubbling, and the stench settled round us worse than ever. And closer yet, louder still, came the pounding that was shattering our nerves.

" 'My God! It's broken out!' whimpered Bill.

" 'Oh shut up!' I answered angrily. 'Crying won't help. The thing's loose. Our only chance is to kill it or get away, as fast as we can.'

" 'You can't kill a thing like that!' he mumbled.

"I knew he was right. There were plenty of balls for the guns, but most of the powder was ruined in the storm. Besides, what effect could the pellets have on a creature of such huge size and unfamiliar nature?

" 'Come on!' I ordered. 'We'll have to hurry.'

"But we halted in dismay before our boat. At least a week would be needed to complete it, and we felt certain that we would not have anywhere near a week's time.

"The way that that monster moved around below us made us shiver. It must have flowed along, for it made a sticky noise, and every once in a while we heard a sort of plop as if it had swallowed something, or maybe felt around with some tentacle like an octopus's that gave out a sucking smack when it jerked away. And ever the pulse drummed louder, hellishly regular, shattering our nerves with each thud.

" 'We'll have to dismantle the boat and make a raft,' I curtly told Bill.

"He started to complain.

" 'Then stay here and rot, unless the thing gets you first,' I cursed. 'We won't have much chance of coming out alive on a raft, but we won't have any chance if we remain here. And we'll have to work fast. It's only a question of hours before the thing breaks on deck.'

"As if to confirm my words, we heard a faint, tentative slithering underneath us.

" 'It's probably smelled us already,' I whispered. 'I think it's feeling around for a way to get at us. It may be able to slide through a crack, like water. Come on!'

"That was enough for Bill. Together we started our work all over again, tearing apart the half-finished dory.

"There was no moon, and the starlight was insufficient to see by. We set up a couple of tapers and labored as best we could in their feeble glow. Labored? It was a humid night. In ten minutes we were soaked with perspiration while we ripped the boards apart and began fastening them into a rude raft. And all the while, the thing throbbed in great beats underneath us, and made loathly noises that nauseated us. If it had been a definite kind of animal, we might have stood it better; but the beast was amorphous, or rather, protean; and the only sounds that it made were its movements and the pulse of its life, except once in long whiles when it emitted an inarticulate and dreadful unvocal cry. I could not help thinking of the beast as a disembodied stomach, expressing its hunger for food; and its audible desire was the more shocking for it implied neither the animal nor the organic, but the sub-vital, the sub-organic; as though the monster, God forgive me for the thought, belonged half-way between dead earth and living bodies.

"Desperate, anxious, fearing, and apprehensive, we worked in semi-darkness with reckless haste. The ship was ghostly on the dark waters, and the tapers shed a phantom glow; very close I heard the eery sounds of the thing below.

"I do not know how long we strove. An hour, perhaps two. The gray dawn was coming before our rough raft had been sufficiently completed to be launched.

" 'Two more planks and she'll be ready,' I told Bill. 'It'll only take me a minute or so to finish. We'll save time if you go over to the stores and bring the food back while I put the planks on. Better hurry!'

"Bill nodded and left. I had barely got one of the planks in place when he returned, staggering under a load of miscellaneous provisions.

" 'Good work!' I encouraged him. 'Now roll the keg of water here and we'll be set to leave.' I heard his steps move away while I prepared to finish my job.

"And I heard an ominous crack, a bursting smash that came without warning. I leaped to my feet and whirled around, suspecting treachery.

"Would God that it had been treachery — anything save the reality that stunned me into a momentary stupor!

"By the dim light of dawn, I saw the main hatch burst open; and out of it bubbled and flowed with torrential swiftness a mass of sickly green corruption, thick, horrible, noxious, suffocating by reason of its putrid stench, and sinisterly alive, and foully sentient with a purpose whose nature I could guess; a heap of crawling liquescence, formless yet held together and directed somehow by a rudimentary awareness; opaque, and yet with dark filaments like hairs or veins or vines weaving a webwork through it; moving swiftly and strangely, with a rhythmic advance and recession, a bloating expansion and contraction as the pulse that dominated the hellish mass rose and fell.

"Between it and me stood Bill, rigid with fright. Then he gave a strangled cry and bounded toward me.

"THE scene that followed is burned for ever on the unfortunate altar of my thoughts. Even as Bill sprang, the pudgy heap vented a rustling hiss and surged outward with a turbulent rush, and flung after Bill a swath of greenish viscidity. He could not help himself, in midair as he was from his leap, and down he came in the green ichor.

"And he kept going down, oh God, he kept going down! He dissolved inch by

inch in that gluey puddle, and his furious thrashings could not budge him a step. Fire can not consume nor acid eat so rapidly as that thing consumed and ate and fed upon him and devoured him alive.

"When he first landed in it, he uttered a piercing shriek, shrill and terrible. I fired both my pistols at the monster, and saw the balls rip into the quivering jelly, but nothing indicated that they had had any effect. Then Bill screamed, a long series of uninterrupted screams, rising and falling, frenzied and tortured and insane, until his voice was raw and only a hoarse and hideous lowing came from his writhing mouth and convulsively cording throat.

"I prayed for blackest night, but the dawn grew lighter and the scene stood out with sickening clearness. I fumbled in haste to reload a pistol; then, with an arm that trembled, I took careful aim, and steadied myself, and fired true. The ball buried itself in Bill's heart.

"He sagged, and what was left of him fell. I hope that I was not wrong when I believed I saw the briefest shine of glad thanks in his eyes before they glazed and went blank.

"And the stuff welled interminably from the hatch, and the corpse dwindled while I watched. A rosy tint began to suffuse the webwork of the monstrous thing, a certain awful muscular distention and contraction shook it, its stench grew insufferable.

"A deep horror racked me with a shudder, then panic, ungovernable terror swept me and I dashed for the rail. I saw the glistening mass drive after me like a hurricane, and I knew that Bill's frightful fate would be mine before ever I could leap into the cleansing sea. And at that moment the sun's rim slid above the eastern horizon, and its golden rays slanted to the deck.

"The monster shrivelled as though tormented. A voiceless sibilance poured from it, it heaved and twisted and contracted madly down the hatch, leaving behind the back and part of the head of what ten minutes ago had been a man. Something in the monster's nature, or its long confinement in darkness, had made sunlight an agony which it could not endure.

"It is now mid-morning. I gave Bill a hasty sea-burial. I have written this narrative and am about to toss it overboard sealed in a bottle, so that if by chance it reach a passing ship, a watch may be kept out for me, and this derelict if it be sighted sunk from a distance or wholly avoided. For the monster still is living below, and its dreadful pulse dins through my thoughts, and its disgusting smell defiles the air with charnel odors. Cheated by sunlight it will emerge again at nightfall.

"I do not know what my fate will be. The raft may capsize when I launch it. If it does not, I may escape, or perish at sea. If it does, I may drown, or make my way back aboard. But here the coming of darkness means certain death—by the thing in the ship, or by my own hand, for sooner suicide than the consuming loathsomeness of the monster.

"May God's grace protect me. There is death whichever course I choose."

"Leaping across the room, he grasped the upraised arm in a vise-like grip."

The Girl With the Green Eyes

By MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

An utterly strange story about witchcraft and occult powers of evil—a story of eery thrills

"AUNT LIZ!" I looked up reluctantly from my magazine, as my niece and nephew burst excitedly into the library, handsome children—Donald, a tall muscular boy of seventeen, with bright dark eyes and an engaging boyish grin—Diane, a decidedly pretty girl of fourteen with my sister's large blue eyes and halo of bright yellow hair. They seemed terribly wrought up over something; but this did not alarm me especially—they were usually agog over something of little importance.

"What now?" I smiled. They both began at the same time with an incoherent rush of words, until I held up my hand for silence. "Please!" I gasped, laughing. "Don, you tell me."

"There's the prettiest woman has moved next door to us, Aunt Liz!" my

nephew began breathlessly. "We saw her through the box hedge. She's the palest thing you ever saw!"

"And she has the hugest black cat that ever lived!" Diane broke in.

"Gosh . . . and is she good-looking!" Donald exclaimed, grinning widely.

That disconnected account was the first I heard of our strange neighbor, the beginning of a series of the weirdest events I have ever experienced; and if I had but known what her moving into the house next mine was to mean to my orphan nephew and his pretty sister, I think I would have picked up then and there and left bag and baggage. But I did not know, and being a skeptical soul about such matters, probably would not have believed the truth had I been warned. So we stayed on, and became involved in a chain of the strangest events a grumpy old maid and two innocent adolescents were ever forced to go through.

Partly through curiosity and partly through a small town custom of being neighborly, the morrow found me, dressed for calling, on my way to pay our new neighbor a call, Don and Diane in tow. We reached the porch of her house, and as I put out my hand to rap with the heavy brass knocker—a curiously wrought thing, being the figure of a nude woman beating (when one knocked with it) with her fists upon a small brass door—the door swung open before I could knock. Our new neighbor stood in the aperture.

SHE was, as Don had said, quite good-looking—tall, nearly six feet was my guess, and well-molded. Her hands were long and slim, with incredibly long nails lacquered a bright red. Her skin was abnormally pale, like the petals of a gardenia; and she wore no cosmetics except on her thin, rather cruel-looking mouth—unless the blood-redness of those lips was natural. Her nose was finely chiseled and thin. Her hair, drawn back severely from her face and fastened in a low knot, was very thick and of a dead lusterless black. These details I noted with only a cursory glance. It was her eyes that held my gaze until it became almost a rude stare.

They held a hint of mystery, those eyes of hers, with their fine brows curving above them like twin circumflexes. Slightly almond-shaped and very slightly slanting, they were a peculiar vivid green, the green of an emerald held to the sun, and shot through with small dashes of red as crimson as blood.

I expected broken English from her, deciding her to be a foreigner; but when she spoke, it was in precise and perfect English, with only the slightest accent, which I could not place as characteristic of any nationality.

I introduced myself and Don and Diane, and informed her that we lived next door and were paying our "Welcome!" call. She frowned slightly at this, as if it seemed strange to her, our calling on her, but she asked us in. Her voice was gentle and low-pitched—it reminded me oddly of the purring of a cat.

She led us into a large room which the former owners had used as a den, and I could not help but gape at the manner in which she had furnished it.

The whole room was in black and lemon yellow, from the black and yellow carpet on the floor and the heavy black drapes with their yellow tie-backs, to the peculiar barber-pole stripe of yellow that ran around the black legs of the furniture. The backs of the chairs were painted yellow—and I nearly gaped out some amazed comment at this—a bat, spread-winged with bright red eyes, painted against the yellow background in black!

On the yellow table runner was em-

blazoned the head of a goat, also with bright red eyes. It had a baleful evil look, that goat, that made me feel queerly cold. Other likenesses of this same goat's head were woven into tapestries hung on the walls, and an extremely large one on a black curtain that screened off a small alcove across the room, in which the former owners had had their piano.

Glancing up, I noticed that the light bulbs in the chandelier depending from the ceiling had been replaced with red globes. I could imagine this room illumined by that red glow, and I did not like the mental picture I saw.

Our hostess fitted into the color scheme herself, wearing a severe black dress with flowing sleeves, with no ornament except a large, repulsive-looking ring of yellow gold set with an enormous onyx spider—unless the long yellow-gold chain that hung inside her bosom held a pendant of some sort. This I could not see, as it remained inside her dress.

An enormous black cat was curled up on a yellow cushion in one of the chairs, and lay watching us with baleful green eyes. Diane, catching sight of the animal, darted over to pet it, with her usual love for animals. I had never seen a creature that did not respond to the child immediately, fall completely in love with her. But this one didn't.

As she laid a gentle, caressing hand on the beast's head, it leaped up, spitting at her, and gave her small hand a vicious rake with its claws, digging four red furrows in the tender flesh.

"Oh!" Diane gasped, jerking back the hand and eyeing the cat reproachfully. "Aren't you ashamed, kitty! No kitty ever scratched me before! They know I like kitties . . ." she crooned in a conciliatory murmur. But this seemed only to infuriate the huge animal, for it appeared about to leap at her face.

"Diablo doesn't like strangers," said our hostess. "I wouldn't play with him; he might hurt you badly."

"Diablo!" laughed Don, glancing from the cat to our hostess, from whose face he had scarcely taken his eyes since we came. "That's a good name for him: 'Devil.' He's a devil, all right!"

Our hostess, who had introduced herself as Mrs. Launde, smiled slightly. "Yes," she said with peculiar emphasis. "That's what he is. *A devil!*"

WE CHATTED for some time about nothing—I rattling along inanely, with my inordinate love of talking—Mrs. Launde speaking only in answer to direct questions—Diane staring with unconcealed interest about the queer room—Don sitting still and silent, with his large eyes fixed upon Mrs. Launde's face with a dreamy intensity. I hoped he wasn't going to have any puppy-love infatuation for the woman—the girl—how old was she? I could not decide; she might be anywhere from sixteen to thirty, with that youthful skin and those worldly almond-shaped eyes. She had said she was a widow, and that was absolutely all she would vouchsafe about herself and her affairs. I like people that let me do the talking as a rule; but there seemed something vaguely sinister about her pronounced reserve.

At last I rose to go. Diane seemed quite willing, if not actually eager, to leave; but Don appeared oddly reluctant. I herded him out at last, however, content with a promise from Mrs. Launde to show him her collection of Oriental and Occidental amulets when he came again. Diane was the last to leave, having gone back after her vanity case which she had left.

As she caught up with us, I noticed that her fair forehead was creased in a

perplexed frown. After a moment she spoke.

"Aunt Liz . . . the funniest thing!" she said slowly. "When I went back to get my compact, she was bending down petting the cat, and that little chain she had on had slipped out of her dress. There was a crucifix on the end of it, but I thought it was so funny . . . it was hanging *upside down!*"

2

THE following morning I drew my easy-chair near the library window that looked out upon the side yard, where Don and Diane and the Parker boy and girl from across the street were playing croquet, with a new delight the younger generation were taking in the games of my young days. The day being Saturday, I held our moldy old family Bible in my lap, with other materials, preparing a talk for my Sunday School class on the morrow. Merrily from outside came the shouts and laughter of Don and Diane and those of the visiting twins.

I paused in my study to watch them, thinking of the days when I was their age. Suddenly Mrs. Parker's voice sounded, calling her twins to lunch, and Don and Diane played out the game alone. Sweet children . . . ingenuous, affectionate, oddly preferring each other's company to that of their friends, sharing their secrets and their successes and their petty sorrows, filling in the empty spaces an old maid aunt might leave at being mother and father to them.

They were playing so gayly, laughing so light-heartedly, arguing insistently, each that the point argued belonged to the other. Then, like a black cloud floating suddenly across the sun, a pale face rose above the hedge, and I recognized our neighbor, Mrs. Launde, who stood watching the children with a peculiar intent stare, unnoticed by them. Almost instantly I noticed a change in the tones of the children's voices. They were quarreling all at once, quarreling bitterly, a thing which they never did. I heard Don, to my surprize, shout out an ugly epithet at his sister—saw him fling his croquet mallet across the yard, as in a violent fit of rage, and Diane staring at him with a look of hurt bewilderment on her face.

Then, softly, I heard the voice of Mrs. Launde calling Don's name. He seemed to stiffen, and I saw him turn and look directly at the spot where she stood, concealed from them by the hedge, as if his eyes had been drawn to the place by a magnet. As she called again, I saw him move slowly toward the spot, stiffly and mechanically like a somnambulist. Diane stared after him, her little head on one side like a startled bird.

Mrs. Launde spoke to Don for a moment, and I saw him part the hedge and crawl through the opening, still with those queer mechanical slow motions of a somnambulist. Diane called to him, but he did not turn to answer until she had called twice again.

"I'm going over to Mrs. Launde's," Don made answer. His voice was strained and toneless. "She's going to show me those amulets she promised."

Diane ran to the hedge, crying excitedly. "Oh, can't I go, too? Please, Mrs. Launde, may I see 'em, too?" She tried to part the hedge and follow them, but she seemed to have some difficulty.

Mrs. Launde did not answer; but I saw her pause and turn her strange green eyes upon the eager child behind the hedge. For a brief moment she stared fixedly at Diane, her eyes seeming to bore through the hedge, her long, slender hands clenched tightly at her sides. For one

brief moment she stared thus fixedly; then I saw my niece clap both hands to her head and cry out sharply:

"Oh! My head! Oh . . . oh-h . . . it hurts!" Forgetting her departing brother, who appeared not to have heard her cry out, but stood looking fixedly at Mrs. Launde, Diane staggered toward our door, still holding her head and moaning as if in great pain. I saw Mrs. Launde relax suddenly, and her white teeth gleamed in a slow smile. Then she turned and continued toward her house, Don walking stiffly at her side, saying nothing.

DIANE stumbled into the room just then, and I turned from the window to look anxiously at her.

"Oh . . . Aunt Liz, I've got the awfulest headache all of a sudden! I feel as if the top of my head is coming off!" She sank weakly into a chair.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, honey." I was all sympathy. "It's queer, though—you never have headaches. Here!" I was rising, and putting my Bible and Sunday School lesson notes in her lap. "Hold this stuff while I go get you some aspirin——"

Suddenly, as I laid the open Bible and scribbled notes in the child's lap, Diane sat up, with a radiant smile tinged with wonder. "Why," she exclaimed, "I'm all right now! The headache went away all of a sudden!"

I smiled at her accusingly. "You faker! I don't believe you had any headache in the first place. I think you just pretended it, so that you wouldn't have to go over to Mrs. Launde's with Don."

She shook her head, with a slight pout. "But I did want to go with them, Aunt Liz! I did want to see those luck charms she told us about! But"—the child scowled slightly as she said it—"I don't think they wanted me to go. She or Don either."

I laughed in an effort to reassure her. "Oh, nonsense! Of course they wanted you to go! Don always wants you around."

Diane shook her head doubtfully. "I don't know," she said, frowning. "He acts so funny when Mrs. Launde is around—almost as if"—her little lip quivered slightly as she said it—"as if he didn't like me! You know," she continued after a moment, "I don't like that Mrs. Launde, Aunt Liz!"

"Why, you mustn't say that, dear!" I expostulated. "I think she's——" I groped for words of praise for the lady which would not be a lie; for secretly I had the same feeling toward our queer neighbor, a sudden violent dislike, like that one feels for a loathsome reptile, though I felt I could not admit this feeling to my impulsive young niece. "I think she's quite attractive," I finished lamely.

"Well, I don't," declared Diane in her impulsively frank way. "I don't like her at all. She looks *mean* to me!"

"Why, what makes you say that, Diane?" I said chidingly, but it struck me how the child's feeling exactly matched mine. Mrs. Launde *did* look "mean"—Diane's word for cruel, and sinister, and immeasurably evil.

IT WAS nearly three hours later that Don came home. The look on his face frightened me. How pale he was! How strangely bright his eyes shone! And his hand trembled violently.

"Well," I began cheerily, "you had quite a visit! What all did you and Mrs. Launde do? I suppose you——" My voice trailed into silence as he turned his eyes to mine, wide, feverishly bright, and unseeing.

"The goat"—he whispered almost inaudibly—"the goat with the blazing eyes!"

"On the table runner?" I said. "Of all the absurd things to use as a decoration . . . a goat's head! I suppose she belongs to one of those ridiculous Eastern cults . . . the higher plane, and all that rot. That would explain that absurd room with its goats and bats and so on. I never could see any sense in that sort of thing! I——"

"It had big blazing eyes!" murmured Don, staring at nothing.

"They were just worked in thread," I said. "Horrible-looking thing! You mean the one on the table runner?" I repeated.

"No," whispered Don. "No . . . it had blazing eyes . . ." He mumbled on under his breath. I stared at him.

"What's the matter with you?" I demanded sharply. "What makes you look so queer, Don? Answer me! Why do you look at me like that?"

He did not answer, stared at me unseeingly, still mumbling under his breath. I reached over and felt his forehead. It was burning hot.

"You've a fever!" I exclaimed concernedly. "Don't you feel well, dear?"

"Flaming eyes," the boy mumbled. "It looked at me . . . horribly . . . horribly!" He shuddered and buried his strained white face in his hands.

"I think you'd better go to bed!" I stated emphatically, again feeling the hot forehead and clammy hands. "Come on . . . up you go! Diane will read to you, if you like—won't you, dear?"

Diane nodded, her big troubled blue eyes on her brother's pale face. "Of course! I'm so sorry you feel bad, Donny!"

All through the afternoon Diane sat by her brother's bedside and read aloud until she was quite hoarse, his rude treatment of her that morning forgiven and forgotten. I took her supper up on a tray with his, and perceived with relief that he seemed better. The queer brightness had died in his eyes, and a little healthy color had come back into his face to replace the unnatural fever-spots on each cheek. He smiled at me wanly. I went back to the kitchen to complete my household duties for the night, and was joined after a few moments by Diane, bearing the news that Don had fallen into a peaceful sleep.

IT WAS some time after eleven, after we had all gone to bed, that I was awakened by the creaking of Don's bed, telling me that he was restless, tossing about, not sleeping soundly. I arose and tiptoed across the hall, opened his door soundlessly and looked in.

He was apparently asleep, but in the throes of a nightmare; for he mumbled inaudible phrases and cried out from time to time. I was about to wake him, when suddenly he sat bolt-upright in bed, eyes wide open but sightless in sleep. He spoke aloud, though so rapidly that I could not catch all of his words. I drew nearer to shake him, when suddenly a phrase reached me. I frowned perplexedly.

"Nobis demitte et . . . terra in et caelo in sicut . . . fiat . . .tuum regnum adveniat . . . tuum nomen sanctificetur . . ." was what he was saying. It came to me suddenly that he was talking in Latin, though I could translate nothing he was mumbling. It seemed a chain of disjointed Latin words to me; then, all at once, a phrase burned itself into my brain, as I reached over and shook him violently to wakefulness.

He stared at me with that same strangely feverish look of the afternoon; then he sighed deeply, as one unutterably weary, and dropped back on his pillow, sound asleep.

I returned to my room, frowning with bewilderment. Latin! Mumbling Latin in his sleep! The phrase I had caught

came back to me: *"Tuum nomen sanctificetur."* Twisting the words around, they meant, translated, "Hallowed be thy name."

I sat up in bed, completely puzzled and wide awake. More of the disjointed phrases came back to me: *"terra in et caelo in sicut"*—"on earth, as it is in Heaven"! The meaning burst upon me. But the Latin should have gone: *"sicut in caelo, et in terra."* I knew what he was saying now—it was the Lord's prayer, in Latin.

I had heard him say it many times before; I had taught it to him as an extra-credit assignment in his Latin class the previous fall. His reciting it in his sleep was not so strange; I had often heard him mumble in his sleep parts of speeches he had memorized for public recitation.

But what did strike me as extremely queer was that in his sleep he had been reciting the Pater Noster *exactly backward!*

3

I DID not go to church the next morning. I was far too worried about Don to leave him. He did not come down to breakfast, nor would he answer to repeated calls. At last, annoyed at him for refusing to get up, I mounted the stairs and knocked sharply at his door. Still no answer, so I opened it and went in.

He lay on his back, apparently asleep, but when I drew near his bed, it was evident that this was no natural sleep he lay in. His eyes were wide open and vacant, and when I spoke to him, he turned his head and stared at me blankly with no sign of recognition. Nor would he answer my frightened inquiries as to what ailed him.

I was thoroughly alarmed by this time, and determined to call Doctor Jemison, our family physician as well as my best friend. I telephoned the doctor to come around right away.

Robert Jemison, as I have said, is my best friend, a quiet, distinguished man six years my senior, with a kindly though virile face, and keen gray eyes that might look stern were it not for an eternal twinkle that comes and goes in them. Some day, I suppose, I shall have to give in and marry him . . . but this is not a love story. Anyway, it is to Robert Jemison that I always turn for medical or other advice.

He was knocking at our door in fifteen minutes. He came into the hall smiling, and asked, "Measles? Whooping-cough? Mumps? What is it this time?"

I shook my head laughing. "None of those. I've seen them through all those, thank heavens! It's Don," I explained soberly. "He's been acting so strange ever since yesterday at lunch . . . high fever . . . sleepless night. Now he's upstairs in bed in a sort of coma. Doesn't seem to know me. I wish you'd go up and take a look at him."

Doctor Jemison nodded wordlessly, and mounted the stairs. I stayed downstairs to help Diane get ready for Sunday School, until I heard the doctor clumping down the steps. I met him in the hall.

He was frowning perplexedly. "Very odd!" he muttered. "Very, very odd indeed!" and aloud to me, "There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with the boy, as far as I can see . . . unless——" He stared at me intently, as if half expecting to find the answer in my face. "Elizabeth," he said slowly with apparent hesitation, "there's something darn queer going on around here! Something scientists would scoff at. Something . . . sinister."

I frowned slightly in alarm. "What do you mean, Robert?" I demanded.

"Don't hedge. Tell me—what is the matter with my nephew?"

Robert Jemison gave me another searching look, and began, with apparent irrelevance, "When I was in prep school, I used to potter about the library reading all sorts of bizarre stuff—Aztec torture methods—Hindoo magic—werewolf and vampire stories—all sorts of hair-raising stuff. Got interested in witchcraft and demonology—read everything I could dig up on the subjects: Cotton Mather—Summers—Murray—Conway. Made a voodoo bag once, my roommate and I. You know, hair or nail-parings done up in a little scrap of cloth with some other rot—'eye of newt and toe of frog' stuff, such as the witches in *Macbeth* put in their brew. We made this charm against a student we disliked—using a hair pilfered from his brush and a broken shoe-string he'd worn—half in earnest, half in fun, you know. Gave us quite a turn when, two days later, the poor devil slipped on an icy pavement and broke a leg. We felt as if our hex or spell had caused the accident. May not have, of course—probably just an accident. We never tried it again to prove——"

"Yes, yes," I burst out impatiently. "But what's that got to do with Don? Or are you trying to change the subject?"

The doctor shook his head. "No, I'm trying to tell you——" He frowned, as if at a loss how to express what he meant to say. "Well, several authorities cite incidents in which the victim of a spell, or cantrip . . . oh, dog take it! You'll think I'm crazy! . . . and you're probably right."

"Will you go on, Robert Jemison, or will I have to——" I burst out in exasperation.

I saw the doctor's jaw set stubbornly then. "No," he said flatly, "I won't. You wouldn't believe me if I told you. I don't think I believe it myself . . . and yet——" He glanced involuntarily up the stairs toward where my nephew lay in his queer trance.

"Robert, I want you to tell me whatever you're hinting at," I pleaded.

"Come into the library then," he gave in at last. I followed him into the room, and seated before the blazing fire on the hearth Robert Jemison talked, reluctantly, almost shamefacedly, glancing at me from time to time as if to see how I was taking his story.

"NOT so long ago," he began, "not more than a hundred years ago, in fact, people were what we of this age call 'superstitious'. They believed firmly in things this age considers utter rot—ghosts, vampires, fairies, and witches. This new generation is a generation of skeptics and scoffers. Just because we invented telephones and airplanes and radios, we think there is nothing we do not know. When something comes up that we can not comprehend or explain by their scientific laws, we declare emphatically and stubbornly that there can be no such thing. We call it 'coincidence' or 'accident'. We call it 'hard luck' or 'the breaks' when something happens to us for no apparent reason. We stubbornly refuse to believe that there are occult forces upon this earth, evil forces that can be directed by a human being's thought or wish.

"In Cotton Mather's time, people recognized the existence of an evil being with supernatural power to cause ill to some one disliked by a thought or a glance. They called that being a 'witch'—a being half mortal, half evil spirit, who possessed certain unearthly powers; such as instant metamorphosis . . . change of shape, usually into a cat or hare; such as 'blasting with a look', as the expres-

sion went—causing pain or death to some one who incurred their ill will by merely staring at the victim intently for a moment."

I controlled a start, the memory of Diane's mysterious headache flashing into my mind.

"There are too many queer incidents in history confirming this belief for it to be shrugged away easily. And if there used to be witches in the dark ages, there are bound to be witches on this earth today—except that we prefer to go right on having sudden unexplainable misfortunes happen to us, rather than admit the possibility of their being the work of a witch, as our ridiculous ancestors did. . . ."

"What are you driving at?" I broke in. "Why this lengthy oration on witchcraft? It's very interesting, but I must say——"

Doctor Jemison smiled slightly. "Sounds as if I'm off the track, doesn't it? No, I'm merely trying to help you believe what I'm about to tell you. And maybe I'm trying to convince myself, too . . . it seems so utterly incredible!" He paused, then staring at my face seriously: "Elizabeth, I'm in dead earnest when I say that I believe there is some evil force hovering over your house. Don's condition—it isn't caused by any physical ill. Nor by any natural mental ill. I've given you this harangue about witches and witchcraft because"—he hesitated—"I believe just such an evil being has young Donald in her power!"

I looked at him a long moment in disgust. "Robert Jemison," I said acidly, "I think overwork has affected your brain! I hope you don't expect me to believe all that rot. Witches! I've read about the Salem horror. The wholesale slaughter of hundreds of innocent victims—all because some superstitious idiot decided some innocent young girl was the cause of a cow's going dry, or an eldest son's dying!"

The doctor smiled slightly. "It wasn't quite *that* wholesale," he corrected. "Actually only twenty were put to death for witchcraft—nineteen by hanging, the remaining one crushed between heavy weights. There were about two hundred alleged witches awaiting death, but they were released by the Governor of Massachusetts Colony, Sir William Phips. No doubt some of those nineteen who met their death were perfectly innocent . . . but"—he paused for emphasis—"there were a few who were not so innocent."

"I see," I said with heavy sarcasm. "The idea was to kill everybody who happened to be around, just in case there might be a witch in the crowd!"

"No," the doctor broke in, smiling. "There were ways of telling a witch. Dogs howled when she passed—flames darted from ashes of a dead fire—and she was usually accompanied by a big black cat, supposed to embody her patron demon or familiar spirit, I think the idea was. This familiar often left the cat and lodged in various human victims, with the aid of the witch's power. The person possessed of this demon would then be compelled to do whatever the witch willed. Then the witches usually wore a crucifix suspended from their necks, upside down. This was a badge denoting that they were in the employ of the Devil and had signed up in a blood pact with him at the Sabbat——"

"The Sabbat?" I echoed, skeptical but interested.

"Oh, it's some kind of ceremony witches and wizards take part in," he explained. "A sort of meeting-place for all evil spirits and devil-worshippers. It's a reversion or parody of the ceremony of mass. The Black Mass, they call it, or

the Sabbat. The devil is supposed to appear to his disciples in the form of a toad, sometimes a dog or an ape, more often a black goat——"

I stared violently. "A goat! With blazing eyes?" I thought queerly of Donald's strange babbling at luncheon.

"Yes," the doctor glanced at me quickly. "What do you know about a goat with blazing eyes?"

"Oh, nothing," I mumbled. "I . . . I just read a story about something of the kind. . . ."

"This Sabbat is pretty horrible," went on the doctor. "Human sacrifice and cannibalism—that sort of thing. The devil-worshippers carry lighted candles and spit upon the floor. Then they repeat the Lord's prayer backward in Latin, and so on. Oh, there's a lot more to it that I read about—can't remember it all." He paused and glanced sidewise at me uncomfortably. "And that's what I think is the matter with that boy upstairs. Some evil being somewhere around here is working a spell on him, and——" He stopped at the amused smile on my face.

I burst out laughing. "Robert, you're absurd! At first I thought you were teasing me, but now I think you actually believe all that rot yourself! And who is your precious witch who is wreaking such havoc on Don? Mrs. Casey, I suppose. Or old deaf Mrs. Potts."

He scowled at me in mock anger. "I knew you'd think I was a fool," he said. "But truly, Elizabeth"—he eyed me seriously, and quoted, " 'There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy'."

He paused again in the act of rising to leave. "But promise me that you'll call me immediately if anything happens that you can't understand . . . and"—with dramatic emphasis—"watch for a woman with bright green eyes streaked with queer dashes of red."

4

I STAYED with Don, peering anxiously down at that white face, with its flushed cheeks and unnaturally bright eyes, until Diane came home from Sunday School. I had not told her of her brother's condition—merely that he was too ill to go to Sunday School and that I would have to stay with him. When she burst into his room upon returning, I could see that she was shocked and frightened by his appearance. I comforted her and sent her out to cut some chrysanthemums for his room.

Glancing from Don's window a moment later, I saw Mrs. Launde part the hedge and come through, talking to Diane. To my annoyance I perceived that she was coming in with Diane. A sudden chill swept over me as I saw her walking beside the merrily prattling girl. Doctor Jemison's words of earlier that morning came back to me—"a woman with bright green eyes streaked with queer dashes of red."

I shook with a sudden feeling of terror as I made my way down the stairs to greet my unwelcome guest. Looking down, I saw Diane open the front door and hold it open, standing aside for Mrs. Launde to enter. All at once our caller leaned weakly against my niece, breathing heavily as if suddenly taken ill.

Phrases from Coleridge's *Christabel* flashed across my mind—the scene where the lady Christabel was helping the wicked enchantress through the gate, evil spirits being unable to cross a Christian threshold unaided:

> "The lady sank, belike through pain,
> And Christabel with might and main
> Lifted her up, a weary weight,
> Over the threshold of the gate.
> Then the lady rose again,
> And moved, as she were not in pain. . . ."

There was a strange expression on the woman's pale face, too, turned away

from my niece—a look, I thought, of malicious triumph. My feeling of vague terror increased. I watched the scene below me, enacted as if in answer to my own thoughts.

To Diane's alarmed inquiry, I heard Mrs. Launde gasp, "I feel faint. Will you help me into the house, my dear, please?" The child put an arm around our neighbor, and leaning heavily upon her, Mrs. Launde stepped across the threshold. The instant she stepped through the door, she straightened again, saying in a strong voice, "I am quite all right now, thank you, my dear," and followed Diane with a firm step into the library.

Jeff, our big gold and white collie, was lying asleep by the fire—or rather the fireplace, as the fire was nothing more than a mass of white ashes. I looked to see the old dog leap up and trot over to the visitor waving his plumy tail in his usual hail-fellow-well-met manner, for Jeff was what is called "everybody's dog," eagerly friendly with every one.

But instead of advancing to greet our guest, the big dog leaped up suddenly, his hackles bristling, his pointed teeth bared in a menacing snarl. Then, as Mrs. Launde advanced toward him, the collie threw back his head in one long soul-rending howl, terrible to hear, and made a dive under the library table, where he remained trembling as with an ague until the lady departed.

I entered the room directly after them, greeting Mrs. Launde as warmly as I could without rank hypocrisy. She shivered slightly, drawing her wrap, a peculiar flowing cape of some heavy black material, around her, and started over to the fireplace.

"I'm afraid our fire has gone out," I began apologetically. "If you'll wait just a minute while I——"

She approached the hearth as I said this, and as she did so, a thin tongue of blue flame darted up from what had certainly seemed dead ashes. I came up beside her and laid a piece of wood over the flame, asking her to be seated. She moved away and sank into a chair some yards from the hearth—and as she did so the tongue of flame flickered out, without lighting the stick of fat pine I had placed over it. I struck a match, but its cheery red flame went out as if in a sudden draft. I struck seven more, to have them go out instantly, when Mrs. Launde declared she was quite comfortable and needed no fire, so I gave up in defeat.

"Where is Donald?" she said after a moment. "Your niece tells me he is ill. I am sorry."

I murmured some platitude in answer; then Mrs. Launde said, in a metallic, peculiarly distinct voice, as if speaking over a telephone to some one slightly deaf, "I . . . should . . . like . . . to . . . see . . . him."

Almost instantly a heavy, halting step sounded on the stairway, and in a moment Don in his dressing-gown stood in the doorway, smiling brightly. He did not glance at me or Diane, but spoke to Mrs. Launde as if she were the only one in the room.

"Don!" I expostulated. "What are you doing up? Go right back to bed this minute!"

He turned to me then, saying, "Oh, I'm all right now," and he looked at Mrs. Launde in a way that said, as eloquently as words, "Now that she is here." And yet it was not said as a young man would say it to a visiting sweetheart; rather, I thought oddly, as a dope fiend might acknowledge some one who had brought his drug.

It gave me a queer feeling to see the boy, a moment before apparently so ill, suddenly risen from his bed and made well by the visit of this woman. I felt that it was not as it should be, not natural —but how little I could have imagined the reason!

The conversation became strained and hysterical. I found myself talking desperately, wildly, as if a moment's silence were a disaster. I was frightened, disturbed, bewildered, by something I could not name and could not understand. I could have shouted with relief when our caller suddenly rose saying she must go.

She walked slowly but without pause to the door, which Don opened for her, not stopping for a last friendly word or so as any one else does. As she passed the boy, I saw her hesitate ever so slightly for an instant, and during that instant she slipped something into Don's hand, something round and flat and shiny like a gold watch. It gave me a chill of fear to see the furtive manner in which the boy, my nephew—my own son reared by me if not born by me—slipped the object into his pocket, with a quick glance to see if we were watching.

WHEN Mrs. Launde had departed, I grasped the lad sternly by his shoulders and spun him around more roughly than I ever had in his life. "Don!" I demanded, meeting his eyes coldly. "That woman slipped something into your hand. Give it to me!"

The boy dropped his eyes and mumbled, "You're mistaken, Aunt Liz. She didn't give me anything."

I gave him a rough little shake. "Don," I snapped. "You're lying to me for the first time in your life. Give me that thing I saw her slip into your hand!"

Then it was that I received a very bad fright. The boy jerked away from me suddenly with a mighty wrench, and stood a few steps away, glaring at me with the most terrible look of rage and hate on his face that I have ever seen. His genial mouth curled into a sneer that was more a snarl, and his eyes, I saw with a shock, had a queer lift to the outer corners, as also did his brows, giving him a frighteningly Mefistofelean look.

"Leave me alone!" he snarled, and I received another terrible shock, for his voice had taken on a harsh guttural quality that was terrible to hear. "Do you hear? Leave me alone . . . or I'll break your neck!" And he turned and ran up the stairs, leaving me gasping with amazement and genuine terror, and I heard his bedroom door slam with a loud bang.

Diane came out of the library at that instant, but I saw with relief that she had not witnessed the terrible scene that had just taken place.

I COULD not bring myself to follow my nephew to his room for some hours. When I did summon enough courage to mount the stairs to find him, I did so with a rapidly beating heart and tremor of actual terror. There was something about the way his dark eyes had glowed like live coals that was not good to see. But I set my jaw and flung open his door without knocking . . . just in time to see the lad throw a leg over the sill of his open window—a window which was a good thirty feet from the ground below. I ran over and pulled him back into the room, shutting and bolting the window.

Then I turned, with an effort to appear as if nothing unusual had happened, hoping this would bring the boy to his senses; for I was almost convinced that he was suffering from a temporary fit of insanity, one of those tantrums which his dead father was said to be subject to as a boy, just a fit of terrible temper,

Turning my back on the lad, I walked casually over to his dresser and stood straightening the objects thereon. His small Bible was there, and I picked it up, chancing to glance in the mirror as I did so. What I saw all but froze the blood in my veins.

For Don—the affectionate genial boy I had reared since he was three—was slipping up behind me, the most fiendish expression distorting his handsome young face, eyes gleaming with that odd red glow, his hands reaching, talon-like, for my throat!

I will have to say for myself that I did well not to lose my nerve and run screaming from the room. I turned casually, and asked in a natural tone, "Donny, have you read your chapter tonight?" It was a habit I had trained in the two children, reading a chapter in the small Bible on their dressers before they went to bed.

Appearing not to notice his murderous attitude and expression, I thrust the Bible into one of those outstretched hands.

But the moment he involuntarily grasped the Holy Book, the boy gave a howl of pain, terribly like that of a wounded wolf, and dropped the Book—not as if it had slipped from his grasp by accident, but as if it had been red-hot and burnt him!

5

MONDAY morning dawned, dark and cloudy, with heavy rain beating down on the roof. It was not a day intended to bring cheer and gayety to the heart; it was sultry and oppressive and gloomy. I did not feel equal to coping with my nephew, strange and murderous and evil as he had looked when he went to bed the night before, on such a dark stormy morning. I did not go to wake him, but went down and prepared breakfast for Diane and myself, answering as lightly as I could her questions about why he was not up. When, after we had sat down to the table, I heard heavy footsteps coming down the stairs, I must confess my inclination was to grasp my young niece by the hand and rush out of the house.

I became almost weak with relief, however, as I heard Don's cheerful call, in his own natural voice, and saw him stroll into the room, rather pale, but quite his old self.

"Whyn't you wake me up?" he demanded, yawning and grinning at us. "Sis gonna eat up all the waffles?" He ran a playful hand over his sister's yellow mop of curls, and sat down.

I looked at him coldly. "Don't you think you owe me an apology for your ugly behavior last night?" I said quietly.

The lad gave me a look of utter bewilderment that could not possibly have been feigned, and frowned slightly. "I . . . I don't know what you mean, Aunt Liz," he said, with an unmistakably truthful ring. "What did I do? I . . . gee, I'm sorry if I said or did anything I shouldn't have. I don't . . . well, last night seems sort of hazy to me. It's funny, but I don't remember a thing that happened yesterday. I just remember playing croquet with Sis and——"

The truth struck me like a blow. He thought today was Sunday. He did not remember going to Mrs. Launde's at all, and in his memory the previous strange day and its queer happenings had never been!

"You've been ill, dear," I excused him, oddly shaken. "You just didn't know what you were doing."

"But what did I do?" he persisted. "You know I wouldn't do anything you didn't like."

"It's all right, dear," I said soothingly. "Just forget about it." He nodded

perplexedly; then I saw him shudder slightly.

"I had a terrible dream last night," he said. "All about a big goat with a long black beard and fiery eyes . . . and . . . and——" He glanced at Diane, grinning. "Funny how dreams can frighten you even after you're awake. You know they're just thoughts in picture form, but they scare you just the same!"

ALL through the morning they sat in the library chattering and laughing, playing backgammon while I read a book. After lunch they came back and started a round of double solitaire, and I went back to my book.

Suddenly I was startled by a shrill cry from Diane, who sat facing the window. I looked up to see her staring, wide-eyed and ashen, at the window blurred with rain.

"Oh!" she whimpered. I could see that the child was very frightened. "Oh, Donny! A big goat! A big goat with the awfulest red eyes! He looked at me through the window!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake," I smiled with relief. "Afraid of a goat! Why, you and Donny used to drive one to a little wagon when you were little! It is probably the Abernathy boy's animal, escaped from his pen. There's nothing to be——"

"No!" sobbed the child hysterically. "Oh no! no! It wasn't Tommy's goat . . . it had big shiny red eyes! Tommy's goat was white, but this one was black with a long black beard! He . . . he looked at me!"

She was weeping violently, and I rose and went to comfort her.

"Don't be a baby, Diane!" I soothed. "It won't hurt you . . . just an old goat. Why, I'm surprized at you, going on like——"

Then suddenly I saw Don's face. It was back—that horrible demoniacal expression, the eyes and eyebrows lifting at the outer corners, the dark eyes blazing like red coals! Without a word he rose from his chair and slipped quickly from the room . . . and a moment later I heard the front door close softly.

He was back in a little less than half an hour, drenched to the skin. To my inquiries, he mumbled something about having left the key to his roadster in the garage and wanting to get it, lest the car be stolen. I did not catch him up on this, merely stared at him troubled and frightened. Another lie! He had had that key in his pocket all morning, and knew it quite well, as he had pulled it out, by accident, when he had reached for his handkerchief.

I was in a quandary. What had come over this sweet, friendly, completely truthful and ingenuous boy whom I thought I knew so well? For the past two or three days he had seemed another person—a monster with my nephew's face and form, but with none of his lovable ways.

Diane had started a game of "single" solitaire, and was bent intently over the board. I had left the room for a moment, leaving Don looking over her shoulder apparently interested in her playing.

I happened to return, without intention, very softly; and so I did not startle Don in the act I saw. He was standing very close behind Diane, bent over with a peculiar tenseness, with his back half turned toward me in the doorway. Something in his attitude caused me to stand motionless, watching.

Suddenly the light gleamed on something long and silvery, and I saw with a suppressed gasp that the lad held a pair of scissors poised over his sister's head. I thought for one horrified moment that

he intended to stab the unsuspecting girl in the back of the neck; but before I could cry out, I saw him lift a short curl of her bright yellow hair, so gently that she did not seem to feel it, and cut it off with a quick silent snip of the scissors. With a furtive movement the boy slipped the curl into his pocket—and said, in a deceptively natural tone, something about the game of solitaire.

I knew somehow that it would be dangerous to question the boy about his queer act, so I kept my counsel. Nothing untoward occurred throughout the afternoon. We ate our supper, read a while afterward, and then prepared for bed. It had been a dismal stormy day, and the rain still beating down upon the roof and against the panes foretold a night much the same.

IT MUST have been around eleven that I heard noises and walking from Don's room. I arose and slipped across the hall. The door was slightly ajar, and through the crack I saw the boy standing beside his open window, through which the rain was pouring in apparently unnoticed by him. His pajama coat was pulled down, baring his muscular shoulder. With one hand he rubbed the shoulder over and over, sticking a finger from time to time into a small round box in his other hand. I opened the door and walked in, eyeing him with a puzzled expression.

As I entered he started violently, and thrust the round box into his pajama pocket, pulling up the coat as he did so. His eyes were blazing with that horrible red glow. It gave me a shock to see him, so terribly had he changed. His round masculine chin had become long and pointed, his face gaunt and extremely pale. Even his ears seemed to have become narrow and pointed like a wolf's, and his teeth long and sharp like the fangs of a wild beast. A look of demoniacal hate and murderous intent distorted his face, as it had done the night before; and it took all the courage I possessed to advance further into that room.

"What do you want?" he snarled, in that dreadful harsh guttural voice, so unlike his own. "Go away . . . get out of here before I kill you!"

He advanced toward me with a menacing movement, then paused as if dazed, his face for a brief instant becoming like his own. He gasped out suddenly in his natural voice, "Go away, Aunt Liz! Oh, for the love of heaven . . . take Diane and go away . . . or——" Then in that guttural tone again, the diabolical look coming back, "What are you doing in here? Get out; I'll kill you! Get . . . out!" And again in his natural voice, "Oh, what am I saying? Aunt Liz, I'm afraid! Something horrible has happened to me! Don't leave me! Oh, please don't leave me! I'm . . . afraid! The goat——"

"The goat" again! How many times in the last few days had I heard Don or Diane cry out that word in fright? What did it mean? I felt suddenly bewildered and frightened.

"You won't leave me?" begged the boy. "Oh, please stay here with me, Aunt Liz!" The lad's lips quivered with fright and two great tears rolled down his cheeks. I had never seen him so frightened; Don had always been a plucky youngster, never afraid of anything His terror chilled me.

"No, dear, I won't go," I said with a calmness that was entirely feigned. "I'll stay right here if you want me to."

"No matter what I say or do?" he persisted, desperately. "You'll stay no matter what I do?"

I nodded steadily, and put an arm around him. He trembled violently for a moment; then he seemed to grow calmer. With my free arm I pulled down the window and then led the frightened boy to his bed. I sat down and pulled him down beside me.

"Now," I said, "everything's going to be all right. Nothing can hurt you, dear. Aunt Liz is right with you," as one would comfort a baby. Then, remembering the attitude I had caught him in, I reached into his pocket and extracted the small box, a common tin pill-box such as can be obtained at any drug store. On the paper top were written the words "flying ointment," and under it what appeared to be a formula, penned in what seemed to be dark red ink.

"What is this, dear?" I asked, puzzled. "Did Doctor Jemison give it to you when he came Sunday?"

The boy looked at it with an expression of terror. "I . . . I don't know. I guess he did."

I nodded, recalling that the boy had said he did not remember anything that had occurred Sunday.

"What's it for?" I pursued. He looked frightened again, but involuntarily a hand groped for his left shoulder. Gently I pulled the coat down, and gave a little gasp of horror.

A squat hideous spider, the size of a half-dollar, was sitting on the boy's bronzed shoulder:

With a shudder I tried to brush the insect off, to discover that it was not a real spider but a remarkable likeness of one worked into the skin as if with a tattoo needle.

"Don!" I cried in dismay. "What ever possessed you to have that horrible thing tattooed on your shoulder?" I recalled that several of the boys in the neighborhood had taken up an absurd fad of getting themselves tattooed—hearts, women's heads, anchors and the like seemed to be the favorite pattern. But a spider! "When did you have this done?"

The boy shook his head dazedly and muttered that he did not know. He glanced at the thing with a shudder, and covered his shoulder with a spasmodic gesture of disgust.

"I saw you rubbing your shoulder with this salve, whatever it is," I said, remembering. "Was that to get if off? Did you show it to Doctor Jemison?"

"I . . . I don't know," whispered the boy. He seemed very drowsy, so I thought it best to put him to bed. I tucked him in the covers as I used to when he was a little boy, and tiptoed out.

It must have been about an hour or so later that I rose and slipped across the hall to see if the boy was all right. Peeping through the crack, what I saw by the dim nightlight I had left on in his room fairly set me wild with anxiety and terror.

The window was wide open again, the rain blowing in with furious gusts . . . and Don was gone!

6

I STOOD quite still for a moment trying to get a grip on my fast-ebbing nerve. Where could he have gone? Why in heaven's name would the boy have crawled out of his window into a rainy black night like this? What should I do? I was at a loss which way to turn. I stood twisting my hands together and staring at the open window. Then I noticed with growing panic that his clothes still lay across the chair where he had flung them. Surely no sane person

would go out in this storm clad only in thin silk pajamas!

Then suddenly I thought of the one person whose image always rises before me in times of stress—Doctor Robert Jemison. If any one could help me, would rush right over the moment I called, it would be he. I ran silently down the stairs, glancing in at Diane in passing and seeing her deep in slumber, to call the doctor's number. It comforted and steadied me just to hear that firm cool voice over the wires.

"Robert!" I gasped. "Can you come over right away? Something dreadful has happened. No, nobody's ill . . . unless Don . . . oh, I can't tell you over the phone! Can you come over pretty soon?"

"Be there before you hang up the receiver," came the terse reassuring reply, and he was knocking at my door almost as soon as he had promised.

"What's up?" came the cool unexcited question, his keen gray eyes searching my face.

Clenching my teeth to keep from bursting into hysterical weeping, I told him, as rapidly as I could with coherence, the whole queer chain of puzzling incidents that had gone before.

The doctor listened without comment to my tale, which took hardly five minutes to relate, a look growing on his face that I could not fathom. "Don has disappeared," I began, fighting for control. "His bedroom window was open, and he's gone, in his night-clothes! He's been acting so strange lately; I don't know what to make of it all!" I told him briefly of Don's demoniacal expression that came and went, of his fear of "a goat with blazing eyes," about the spider-tattoo on his shoulder, and the salve with its formula written in dark red ink. "I supposed that you gave him that," I half stated, half asked.

The doctor frowned bewilderedly. "Salve? What kind of salve? I didn't leave any salve when I called Sunday."

I stared at him. "Then where could it have come from?" I burst out. "It was never here before. I know the contents of our medicine cabinet——"

"Have you the stuff with you?" Doctor Jemison suddenly broke in. "Maybe it will give some clue as to——"

I ran up the stairs and came back quickly with the small box, which I found on Don's dresser. "Here it is," I said as I handed it to the doctor. He took it to the light and bent over it for a moment, reading the words on the top in a half-audible murmur.

"I don't understand it at all," I burst out again. "The boy hasn't been the same since that queer-looking woman moved in next door——"

"'Flying ointment,'" mumbled Doctor Jemison. "'Flying ointment!' What the devil——" Then he jerked his head up with a sudden start, and stared at me with eyes wide and alarmed.

"Elizabeth," he whispered hoarsely, "do you know what this is?" I shook my head in silent bewilderment. "It's a concoction supposed to give witches the power to fly through the air to the Sabbat! Of course it doesn't really give them any such power, but merely produces the sensation of flying," he spoke in an excited rush of words. "You'll find all about it in any book on witchcraft. It's compounded of aconite, belladonna, and hemlock or nightshade. The hemlock and aconite produce mental confusion, irregular heart action, and dizziness. The belladonna would cause excitement and eventually delirium, a murderous sort of frenzy rather like the effect of hashish, I imagine. The formula is not supposed to be effective unless written in the blood of a baby murdered at the Sabbat. Bat's

blood, the fat of an infant, and soot are also used, but the effective ingredients are the three I've named, to be rubbed into broken skin or some skin defect, like the Devil's Mark——"

"The Devil's Mark!" I gasped. "What under heaven——"

"Oh, it's something like a birthmark," explained the doctor rapidly. "In olden times ecclesiastical and civic courts used to accept the mark as positive proof that the person was a witch or a witch's 'familiar'. Sometimes it was just a small black mole on the body, more often a remarkable likeness of a toad, or a frog's foot, or a spider. It does not bleed and feels no pain when an incision——"

"A SPIDER!" I leaned weakly against a chair, staring at Doctor Jemison with wide eyes. "Like Don's! A hideous-looking mark like a spider—as if tattooed on his shoulder? I saw him rubbing some of this ointment into it——"

The doctor's face paled. "What!" he croaked. "My God! The worst has happened! Where in heaven could the boy have got the stuff, do you suppose? If we can find that out, we may be able to——"

Suddenly a picture rose in my mind again, as vividly as if I were seeing it with my eyes—Mrs. Launde passing close to Don in the doorway and slipping a round shiny object into his hand.

"Mrs. Launde!" I gasped out. "I'm sure that was what she slipped into Don's hand when she——"

"Mrs. Launde?" snapped the doctor. "Who's that?"

"She's just moved in next door . . . oh, Robert! And her eyes are like you said, green with red dashes! And the crucifix upside down! Diane saw it! Oh, it seems incredible . . . terrible . . . but I believe you were right."

"Next door, eh?" The doctor threw me a raincoat, and donned his own rapidly. "Come on . . . follow me!" he jerked out in a strained voice, darting out the door into the pouring rain. "Pray heaven we re in time!"

I hurried after him, oblivious of the lashing rain.

Suddenly the hysterical cries of a woman rose above the roar of the storm. I paused, terrified by the agonized wailing. "What's that?" I gasped, running to keep up with Doctor Jemison. Sounds like a woman crying."

"Is," he said tersely. "Mrs. Parker—had a call from there just as I was leaving home. Hysterics. Her baby—little Margret, you know—disappeared from her carriage on the porch just about dusk. And unless I'm radically wrong——" He quickened his pace to a trot.

WE REACHED the door of Mrs. Launde's house breathless and panting, and I was surprized to see Doctor Jemison turn the knob softly and enter without knocking. I followed silently, with a rapidly beating heart and clammy hands.

The hall was dark as we entered, but the doctor motioned to me not to press the light switch. As we closed the door a weird odor swept over us, stifling after the clear damp air outside. It was a musty smell, rather sweet and pungent yet vaguely repellent, like the perfume of tuberoses and the smell of an old tomb, I thought with a slight shudder, the smell of death.

Slowly my ears began to make out a low gentle mumbling that seemed to issue from the direction of the library, the door of which was slightly ajar, dimly illumining the pitchy hall with a red glow—from those red bulbs in the ridiculous room, I remembered. Slowly the

mumble became more audible, and I knew all at once that a woman's voice in that absurd black-and-yellow room was mumbling in Latin!

"Nobis . . . miserere . . . mundi," the voice suddenly rose to a shout. *"Nobis . . . mundi . . ."*

The words became plainer as we tiptoed silently through the semi-dark toward the door with the red glow. *"Domine adduua nos!"* another shout, frenzied and shrill and exultant, came to us.

We reached the door at this instant, and the doctor and I stood staring into the room at the most hideous sight I have ever been forced to witness. I swayed weakly as I looked, and felt the doctor's strong arm reach out to steady me.

I shall never forget that scene. The room, with its weird yellow and black furniture and draperies, glowed mysteriously in the light of the red bulbs, as if illumined by the fire of hell itself. At the far end of the room, in that small alcove, with that heavy black curtain emblazed with the large goat's head which had screened it, drawn back, stood a table rigged up to represent a crude altar. On this table, illumined horribly by the red glow and the sickly light of a tall black candle on the table's corner, squatted a huge, hideous toad. The small gold collar about its ugly pulsating throat and the gold chain that bound it to the "altar" gleamed dully in competition with the creature's blazing eyes, which shone like twin coals of fire and seemed to throw off a yellow glare.

But it was not the toad that struck me dumb with horror. It was the sight of the two figures kneeling, as if in worship, before the repulsive creature, and the small form that lay on the "altar's" edge.

One was that of a woman—I recognized our queer neighbor, Mrs. Launde, dressed in a flowing black robe, her lack-luster hair unbound and falling about her shoulders in a dark cloud. The other figure—I could scarce repress a cry as I beheld my nephew Don, clad only in his thin silk pajamas which clung wetly to his body, kneeling before that dreadful altar at the side of Mrs. Launde. The third and smaller figure that lay, gurgling and kicking, on the "altar" before the toad, was the Parker's baby, little Margret!

"Domine adduua nos!" murmured the kneeling woman, holding out to the toad in a gesture of adoration a dark object that proved to be nothing more than a hunk of black bread. Suddenly snatching up the lighted black candle, she spat upon the floor. Don mimicked the act, in a mechanical parrot-like gesture, his eyes glued upon the toad. Then the woman set the candle and the bread on the altar before the toad, and picked up an object I could not see, as their backs were toward us, rising to her feet. Don rose also with the stiff movements of a robot.

"Sabaoth . . . deus . . . sanctus!" the woman shouted suddenly, and as I saw what she was about to do, a rasping scream tore from my throat in sheer horror. For I saw her right arm raised aloft suddenly above the child on the "altar." A long wicked-looking knife gleamed in her hand, poised to plunge downward into the tender throat of the baby, who gurgled and cooed to see the shiny object above her and reached for it as if it were a pretty toy, innocently ignorant of its impending doom.

"Gloria tibi!" screamed the woman—and the knife fell swiftly . . . but not swiftly enough.

WITH a hoarse yell that matched mine in vocalized horror, Doctor Jemison sprang through the door, and leaping across the room with great strides, grasped the upraised arm in a

vise-like grip and wrenched the murderous knife from the slender white hand. With his left hand he clutched the small crucifix that hung, as Diane had said, upside down from the chain about Mrs. Launde's neck, and tore it off. I stood, rigid with horror, unable to aid him, dumbly watching the scene with eyes that started from my head.

I saw Don leap up snarling, that dreadful murderous look distorting his face, and spring at the doctor. Doctor Jemison stepped back quickly, and turning the crucifix right side up, as it should be reverently held, thrust it out in front of him and touched Don with it. As he did so, the lad gave a howl of pain, as he had done when I gave him his Bible, and sank to the floor in a dead faint.

Then I saw Doctor Jemison turn swiftly toward the woman, Mrs. Launde. On her face there was a duplicate expression, only perhaps more venomous and murderous, of that I had seen on Don's. Slowly the doctor advanced toward her, holding the crucifix reverently before him, and saying steadily, "Back! Back to hell, daughter of Lilith and Satan! Back, I tell you!"

I saw the woman crouch as if about to spring upon Doctor Jemison; then suddenly she relaxed, her face twisting as if in terrible pain.

"Turn it upside down!" she moaned. "Upside down!" She retreated slowly as if before a sharp sword.

Suddenly she lowered both hands in a gesture of supplication downward as we would raise our arms upward to heaven. There was a loud explosion and a thick cloud of sulfurous yellow smoke rose as if from the cracks of the floor and billowed about the woman, screening her from us completely. The doctor fell back, gasping and coughing at the acrid smell which pervaded the room, like the odor rising from old sulfur wells and the smell of wet matches.

I stood in the doorway gaping, when suddenly something small and furry darted by me through the doorway. I gave a startled cry, and glanced down just in time to see a very large wild hare, with great eyes that glowed a phosphorescent green, shot through with weird dashes of crimson, leap by me into the hall.

I turned again dazedly to the scene inside the room. Don still lay, unconscious and breathing heavily, where he had fallen, his face relaxed in an expression of infinite peace. The doctor, still clutching his crucifix and coughing and gasping, was looking wildly about, a look of utter bewilderment on his face. I shared that bewilderment when I saw its meaning.

For though every window was closed and, as we discovered after a brief examination, securely locked from the inside—and I had barred the only exit from the room—Mrs. Launde had vanished!

I GATHERED my wits after a moment and advanced slowly toward that hideous "altar," with a shudder of revulsion at the sight of that ugly bloated toad squatting thereon and glaring at me balefully with those luminous reddish eyes. Then my eyes shifted to the cherubic face of little Margret, kicking and gurgling on the table top. I shuddered as I recalled how near she had come to a horrible death.

Then my eyes fell upon a small object lying beside the triangular hunk of black bread and the flickering candle. I picked it up, frowning. Doctor Jemison, drawing near, examined the thing also.

"Somebody had a close call," he remarked tersely, touching the object with a finger.

"But . . . but whatever is this doing here?" I murmured.

"You recognize it?" he said glancing at me quickly.

"Certainly I recognize it!" I replied impatiently. "It's a lock of my niece's hair. I'd know those yellow curls anywhere. And I saw Don snip it off this morning when Diane wasn't looking. I thought it extremely queer at the time——"

"Hmm!" muttered the doctor gravely. "As bad as that!"

"What do you mean?" I asked in an awed whisper, now not quite so ready to scoff at the doctor's explanations. "What were they going to do with Diane's hair?"

"I don't know exactly," said Doctor Jemison. "Work some kind of cantrip or hex or something on the child, I think. I suppose Don's love for his sister was threatening to break Mrs. Launde's power over the boy, so she decided to put Diane out of the way, at the same time that she forced the boy to sign a sort of contract with the devil in the blood of . . . it's too horrible to say!" Robert Jemison shuddered. "If the cantrip with this lock of hair had gone through, young Diane would have had an 'accident' in a day or so—been run over by a car, or something of the kind. A sort of thought-murder—that's about the only way I can explain it.

"We'll take little Margret home to her mother," he went on, with a glance at the baby. "Have to tell the poor lady that Mrs. Launde kidnapped the child for ransom—wouldn't do to tell her the truth."

"And what will become of Don?"

"Oh, he'll be all right," the doctor assured me. "Keep him in bed a few days—he won't remember a thing about this, so don't tell him anything—or Diane either. That mark on his shoulder will go away in a day or so, I think, if he's kept away from——"

The doctor broke off at a sound of scuffling and a patter of small feet in the hallway. We dashed to the door and peered out into the semi-gloom, to see my collie Jeff—he must have entered with us unnoticed in the excitement—chasing some smaller animal up and down the hall, howling strangely. The creature dashed into a patch of light then, and I saw that it was the large hare which had darted past me through the door. Suddenly, with an abysmal howl instead of his customary excited barking, the collie pounced upon his quarry and shook it by the throat again and again.

I felt Doctor Jemison's hand clutch my arm, and glanced over my shoulder at him to see his eyes fixed on the dog and his catch with a curious expression.

"Look at that hare's eyes!" he whispered in a queer hushed voice. "Green with bright red streaks! No hare's eyes ever looked like that!"

I stared silently at the struggling animal, thinking that the same thing had struck me as queer.

At that moment, with a vicious snap and shake, Jeff bit into the beast's furry throat. The hare gave one convulsive jerk before it hung limply from the collie's jaws—one piercing agonized cry that was no animal cry, but the scream of a woman.

It echoed horribly through the silent house, grown even more deathly still now that the rain had ceased its thundering on the roof. The collie dropped the creature and backed away, trembling violently, ears laid back. Suddenly he sat back on his haunches and his dismal howling shattered the tomb-like stillness.

I turned my gaze again upon the dying hare at our feet, upon the creature's strange eyes, and saw their phosphorescent green glow, streaked with vivid red, fade slowly in the semi-darkness.

The Carven Image

By AUGUST W. DERLETH and MARK SCHORER

The story of a wooden image endued with a hideous life—a grim tale of three bloody murders

"Once more the carven image had killed."

MY LIFE has become hopelessly entangled in a web of strange occurrences, of which I have somehow become the focal point and at the same time the motivating force. I think the end of it all is not far away, and because I feel this way I am writing out this short account of what has thus far happened.

I was born and reared in the middle-western city which is the seat of the University of Wisconsin. Our house stood at the end of a short blind court, at one street corner of which stood the old home of the Skuldts, a family that traced its American residence back to a pioneer who had come to America almost a century earlier and had erected the building. This structure was in itself a constant source of wonder to me as a child, representing as it did an architecture entirely foreign to anything which might conceivably be called American. It was built of wood in good Scandinavian tradition, much of it brightly painted in blue and green, with little turrets topping every corner, and the upper gables projecting. Yet, despite its pleasant appearance, there was something somber about the house, something for which the

thick hedge of small pine trees which ran around three sides of it failed to account. On the fourth side was the lake front.

Each side of this dark hedge was broken into by stone gate-posts and wooden gates, but it was only the front gate that interested me. The stones of one of these posts were laid in the shape of a hollow shell facing the street; in the niche thus formed stood the wooden figure of a woman. The memory of this wooden figure is the earliest and sharpest recollection of my childhood.

The carven image was that of Helsa, a forgotten goddess of the sea. She was, it was said, the creation of a small group of mariners whose eyes were turned away from the gracious Gods of their ancestors to other deities whose names were mentioned only in whispers. Helsa was supposedly one of these. The wooden figure stood on a low pedestal. She herself was painted in blue, the color of the sea. Her face was naturally colored a pinkish-white with carmined lips. Her intense eyes were blue as the sky, and her hair was a bluish yellow.

The expression on her face was peculiar, for it did not always seem the same to me. Sometimes it seemed merely to stare dully forth, as one would suppose a thing of wood to look. But at other times the strange blue eyes were alight with perception, the mouth seemed to curve slyly in a smile that belied the wood out of which it was carved. Occasionally, too, I fancied that her arms, which were crossed over her breast, moved ever so little.

When I was very small, I thought her merely a curiosity. I remember looking often at the image in childish wonderment, amazed that a thing of wood could be so like a person, unable to think it merely a doll with human proportions. But by the time I started school, my attitude began to undergo a change. My curiosity became mingled with awe, changed into an intenser wonder. I can not define this change, nor can I say what agency, if any, brought it about. I remember Helsa first as one being, then as another, and the transition is a blank, a movement unrecorded in my memory.

Since our court had but one entrance, and since my home was at its end, it was of course necessary for me to pass the carven image, even though I walked on the opposite side of the street. As a boy going to school I invariably walked on Skuldt's side, seldom with a thought for Helsa. But at dusk, when I returned from school, when the sun was setting or had set behind the wall of trees to the west, I was often impelled to cross the street, a faint repulsion for the somber Skuldt house and Helsa lingering in my mind. Often this action was entirely unconscious. Upon entering the court, I would veer abruptly to the right, and only after changing my course would I become aware that I was avoiding the sight of the carven image. I believe that this unconscious act came long before my actual antipathy for the image; I believe, in fact, that the antipathy I shortly developed was the external admission of a subconscious fear that I had always held for it.

Is it strange, then, that from antipathy for the image I should grow to fear it? I did. And yet, perversely enough, with this growing fear grew a sense of intense liking for the carven image. My fear was always strongest at dusk, when Helsa's outlines were obscured by twilight, her face veiled in shadows, and when I imagined that her expression was definitely changing beyond the veil of darkness my eyes could not pierce. As I reached adolescence, and understood to what proportions my childish antipathy had grown, I attempted to reason with myself. In

consequence, I occasionally forced myself to pass the Skuldt estate. Yet this did no good, for I never passed the carven image without feeling a definite relief at having left it behind. It is not strange that under such strain the carven image of Helsa should attain in my mind a reality which it did not have. Still I persisted in passing the goddess, and at last I felt that I had conquered my adolescent fear. One evening late in November I came from school and stopped before the image in the niche. My fear had almost entirely vanished, and I had no hesitation in standing there to look at Helsa.

In the darkness her deeply shadowed face was startlingly white, and her eyes seemed alive. I stared boldly at her, beginning to feel amusement at the memory of my childish fear. And then, in the gloom, I saw her hands move. I saw her fingers open, the arms stretch out. At the same moment the black mouth widened in a smile!

I turned and fled instantly.

I remember that I rushed wildly into the house, crying with an odd insistence, "Helsa *is* alive! Helsa *is* alive!" as if I had all along entertained this fantastic thought. The result was that I was marched straight back to the carven image and shown in the light of my father's flash-lamp that Helsa could not possibly be alive. Furthermore, I was mildly punished, and after my father's insistent statement that I had imagined Helsa's movement, I ultimately convinced myself that I had.

IN MANY ways that early event was fortunate for me. My father's firm conviction gave me the same conviction, and from that time on I found myself looking upon my fear for Helsa as a part of childhood left for ever in the past.

With college came absorption in new matters, and an even completer growing away from the things of childhood. My work was in philosophy, and it was through this study that I met and learned to know Doctor Stengler, one of the foremost philosophers in the university. When I was a senior and well on in my studies, he began his book, *Thought and Matter,* and to my inestimable pleasure, he asked me to assist him in the technical matters of annotation and bibliography. It was through this work that I came into a thorough command of the philosophy of Bishop Berkeley and the entire school that followed him; thus I came myself to believe that there was much in the theory that the world of realities as we know it is non-existent, that everything exists only as a projection of the individual's thought. Thus, too, I came to understand the power of thought, the theory that "thoughts are things," and this opened up suggestive fields before me.

By the end of my last year at college Doctor Stengler had completed his research, and had only to finsh the book. Deciding that there were places more congenial to composition than our city, he obtained leave of absence for two years and left for Europe.

In the meantime, I was graduated and had accepted a minor position on the staff of the philosophy department of the university. A year passed and I was offered a larger appointment, which I promptly accepted. It was this appointment that enabled me to take the single step necessary for the completion of my happiness: marriage to the woman I loved.

Elissa Hardy had come into my life when first I entered college. She was everything that I was not; calm and collected, coolly beautiful, tolerant. In appearance she was tall and willowy, with a slim body that was as supple as it was lovely. Her shapely head was finely poised; her hair flaxen, her eyes a lumi-

nous gray. For five years I worked only for her, awaiting with impatience the day on which I might marry her.

IN JUNE of my first year as an instructor at the university I was offered the advance of which I have written. That night I went to Elissa, and that night she consented to marry me. I left her home, walking, as tradition has it, on air. The life that stretched out before me was filled with endless promise. I was so happy that I walked home with exaggerated slowness, drinking in the night, which, as a reflection of my own pleasure, seemed heavenly. Then suddenly, crowding through my happiness, came the sharp and disturbing impression that I was being followed. I wheeled. There was no one on the street.

Somewhat chilled, I went on, walking faster. Again I was sure that I heard footsteps behind me, footsteps adjusting their pace to mine with sinister deliberation. This time I looked about me more carefully, but again there was nothing to be seen. I began to feel that I was the victim of a strange illusion. Yet, by the time I reached home, my happiness had taken flight, and I was oppressed by an inexplicable sense of impending danger. And when I went to bed I felt a distinct suggestion of disaster lurking in the background.

I do not know how long I slept before I was awakened by a tapping at my window. In my semi-conscious state I immediately assumed that a storm had come up and that the tapping was but a branch of one of the great pine trees outside striking against the pane. But the insistence of the tapping was too disturbing for the branch of a tree, and the regularity of the sound convinced me that it was made by some other agency. Then, coming suddenly awake, I noticed that there was no wind outside, and that the noise was made by a hard surface, possibly a metal. For a moment I lay quiet. Then I slipped noiselessly from the bed, crept to the window, and opened it.

The grounds were bathed in a misty radiance coming from the beclouded moon above, but there was no one beneath the window. I looked at the low-hanging branches of the closest trees: they were quiet. Then abruptly I saw a dim figure keeping close to the darkest shadows. A momentary patch of moonlight revealed a familiar face; then it was gone. Who was it, man or woman? I did not know, but this time it was not an illusion. I had very definitely seen some one, some one familiar both in feature and cloaked shape. For a moment I continued to stand at the window, and as I stood there I had the distinct impression that some one hidden in the darkness beyond was endeavoring to communicate soundlessly with me.

Then a message came through as clearly as if some one had repeated it aloud. There was no apparent explanation of the phenomenon, but its strange delivery was forgotten in the shocking import of the message that came as a warning from the darkness—*You must not marry Elissa Hardy!*

The rest of the night my sleep was fitful and dream-haunted.

DESPITE my nocturnal belief in what I had seen, I laughed at my experience in the morning. As I dressed, as I ate my breakfast, I thought that the whole thing had been a dream, that I had really heard and seen nothing except in a dream. In my world, I decided over my coffee, shadows had no place, for fate had thus far been kind to me, and every indication pointed to further kindness.

How much better had I heeded that strange warning!

After breakfast, as usual, I spent some time pottering about with plants and shrubs in my garden. I paused under my bedroom window, where I had recently planted several new bushes; but my attention was almost immediately diverted from the bushes by definitely outlined footprints in the damp ground. My surprize was heightened when I noticed that the prints had not been made by feet encased in shoes. There were no marks of heels, which would have sunk into the soft ground, nor were there marks of soles. Then abruptly I saw a clear print in the ground next the bushes. In the loose earth I saw that the foot had indeed been bare, for there were the outlines of five toes, and the shape of the print left no doubt that the footsteps had been made by a woman! And it was easy to see that she had stepped lightly.

So I had not been dreaming in the night after all.

On my way to classes an hour later I happened to meet the caretaker of the Skuidt estate; he was trimming the pine hedge when I passed. The family being at this time in Europe, the house had been closed except for the caretaker's cottage on the lake shore behind.

"Good morning, sir," he greeted me.

"Hello, Jenks."

The old man straightened up with some difficulty, obviously bursting to speak further to me. "Did you hear anything around here last night?" he asked.

I hesitated. Then, "Why, no, Jenks, nothing that I remember. Anything wrong?"

"Some one's been having fun around here." He beckoned me solemnly toward the front gates. "Look at that!" he exclaimed with exasperation in his voice. "Kids, I s'pose."

He was indicating the carven image. I looked at it and saw that the statue had been moved on its pedestal. Then I saw the direction of its wooden gaze. Was it coincidence that Helsa was turned in the direction of my house?

"Some one's moved it," I said.

"You bet they did. And got it dirty."

"Dirty?" I echoed.

He nodded. "And now I'll have to wash it. See that?" He moved closer and pointed again.

I looked at the bottom of the statue, at the folds of the wooden robe that fell toward the five bare toes that showed beneath. With an inexplicable feeling of fear, I saw clinging to robe and toes a little loose black loam—like that in which the bushes beneath my bedroom window were planted!

Jenks spoke again, asking me to help him move the statue back into place, since he supposed from its size that it was too heavy for one man to handle. Together we put our arms around the image, but we had hardly touched it when it became obvious that the figure was very light, that it was hollow, and that one man could easily move it. Was it my imagination that made me feel for a fleeting moment that the wooden robes of the carven image seemed to cling caressingly to me, as we moved the image back into place together?

I went to my work definitely disturbed, and spent the next few days apprehensively pondering the strange warning that had come to me, and its aftermath. But my approaching marriage to Elissa Hardy finally drove all thought of the carven image from my mind—until the frightening memory of the sea goddess once more crashed into my consciousness.

On the eve of my wedding a tapping at my window again awoke me. This time I came awake at once, but fearing what I might see, I hesitated to open the window. The tapping on the pane continued, more insistently than ever; it was

as if the intruder knew that I had awakened. At last I got up, not without trepidation, threw open the window, and looking out into the black night, saw again that vaguely familiar figure, saw that white face flashing across my vision. Then it was gone. The June night wind, cool and fresh, blew into the room. And once again I had a distinct message: *You dare not marry, for you belong to me!*

I slept no more that night.

IT WAS a drawn-faced bridegroom that Elissa Hardy took as her husband at noon the next day. Yet, despite the shadowy figure of the carven image lurking in the background, I returned from our two-months' honeymoon in the early part of September with my happiness unadulterated by any alien fear. But we had not been at home two weeks when the greatest catastrophe of my life occurred, robbing me at one ghastly stroke of the promise of my future.

At dusk one night Elissa and I went boating. The day had been hot and the breeze that blew over the lake was refreshing. We had not been out long when the clouds that had been lowering on the horizon pulled themselves up over the sky, and the breeze that had been blowing all day changed to a sharp wind that drove the smooth water of the lake into choppy, white-capped waves. Our boat began to rock violently, but we were not alarmed, for we were not far from shore and the wind was not yet violent enough to endanger us.

I had turned immediately upon the rising of the wind, and was heading for shore, when suddenly something solid struck the boat a terrific blow from below, and in a moment we were overturned and struggling in the water. At the same moment it began to rain torrentially. Yet I was not alarmed, for I knew she was a good swimmer.

Then abruptly Elissa disappeared, jerked beneath the surface with the suddenness of a cork on a line weighted by a fish. I struck out for the spot where she had vanished, and immediately the wind and the waves widened the distance between the boat and me. Elissa reappeared suddenly, struggling madly, and I spurted forward. Then once again she went down, and came up no more. I made a desperate attempt to find her by diving beneath the waves, but only exhausted myself until I felt I would never reach shore alive; for, far as it was, the shore was now closer than the overturned boat. I felt myself losing ground. I swallowed large mouthfuls of water. Just as I was on the verge of losing consciousness, I became aware of strong arms about me, and saw a familiar face. Then I sank into unconsciousness.

Not quite an hour later I came to myself on the shore of the lake—fully ten feet away from the water. The storm was over, and though the lake was still rolling against the shores, it was considerably calmer than it had been during the storm. I looked around me, and saw that I lay on the Skuldt estate. Then, feeling my wet clothing, I recalled with horror the catastrophe that had taken Elissa from me. I stumbled to my feet and ran along the lake to my own house, where the lone servant in the kitchen had just laid two places for that night's dinner.

HOW I got through the remainder of that ghastly night is beyond memory. Just before dawn Elissa's body was recovered, and at once I found myself subjected to sharp and bewildering questions; for there were scratches and bruises on her lovely body, as if she had fought some one just before death came. My own horror was far greater than that of those who questioned me, and it was perhaps largely my sincerity that convinced

them that the strange marks upon Elissa's body were the result of being buffeted against the overturned boat. I alone knew that Elissa had been thrown clear of the boat, had not once come near it from the moment of its overturning to the time of her death!

I could not tell the truth I had guessed, for I recalled that familiar face next my own in my last moment of consciousness in the turbulent waters, and recognized it as that of Helsa, the carven image at the front gates of the Skuldt estate. I could no longer deny that there existed a definite life-force which animated Helsa. And for some reason the strange unearthly force inhabiting this wooden thing had attached itself to me with an unholy fixity which brooked no interference! For Helsa had drowned Elissa, just as she had saved me, and it had been Helsa, too, who had warned me twice before the wedding that I must not marry. Only now did I realize most bitterly how much better it would have been if I had heeded these phantom warnings.

But by what means had Helsa come to life? I recalled vaguely-rumored stories of the black sorcery supposedly believed in and practised by those old Scandinavian families, one of whose deities Helsa had been. Could there have been something in those old stories? Then I recalled my own study in philosophy, the ideas of Bishop Berkeley, the belief that the only reality existed in the mind. I thought of the theory that "thoughts are things," and with growing horror I realized that my childish regard for Helsa, my adolescent fear of her, had endowed her with a frightful life-force, a power that had become possessive, allowing no one to attach himself to me, allowing me to become attached to no one!

I tried several times to disbelieve the theory of Helsa's life-force, but I could not; so I set about thinking how I could deliberately test my theory, and if I could prove its reality, how I could remove this evil I had so unwittingly brought to influence my existence. Doctor Stengler, whose book was now completed, had returned; and after some hesitation, I went to him with my problem. He welcomed me, and I told him everything that had occurred, stating the obvious conclusion.

When I had finished, he looked at me in amazement, his brown eyes wide. He forced a smile and said, "You must be wrong, Speers."

"Wrong!" I exclaimed. "That from you, you who have always taught these philosophies?"

Doctor Stengler smiled. "You are wrong in that, at least. I have never taught the philosophy from which your conclusion springs; I have but attempted to outline its development, to explain its existence. Even in *Thought and Matter* I make no attempt to assert its credibility."

I came to my feet. "Whether you have ever cared to admit its credibility before now does not interest me, Doctor. I'm speaking to you not as to a learned man but merely as to an intelligent friend. Tell me if my explanation, so far as my experience is concerned, is not entirely credible."

Doctor Stengler matched his finger tips and pursed his lips. He looked up at me. "And if I do admit it as credible, what then?"

"Then you must tell me what to do. You must show me how I can cut loose from this frightful influence."

Doctor Stengler spoke again, and I sensed a more kindly intonation in his voice. "If what you have told me is indeed true, then I believe you are right. You have given the thing a hideous life by your constant thought of it; the fear you have held for it in your mind has

come into actual existence, and the thing has progressed so far as to want to control you, to feel an emotion, a human emotion distorted by the thing's warped vision, an emotion of ghastly love for you, who have created its life!"

For a moment I could not speak. Doctor Stengler had pointed out the salient factor of which I had remained in ignorance. The thing not only attached itself to me, but attached itself as a possessive lover, a furiously jealous thing fixed to its unwitting creator with a blind and hopeless passion!

"Good God!" I murmured. "I understand more fully now. Yes, everything I told you is true. I am as certain of that as I am of my presence here."

"Then the image must be destroyed, the focal point of its being wiped out, so that the force you have created can escape and die, having no longer a material counterpart. I believe that is the only way of escape."

I said nothing.

"And I further believe," he continued, "that it should be destroyed by fire. I think you had better try to buy it from old Skuldt. Then, once you possess it, lose no time in burning it."

I LEFT my friend's home with a lighter heart. But my problem was not yet solved, for I learned soon enough that old Skuldt would under no circumstances sell his wooden image. It was very old, and it had been in the family for over two hundred years. Besides, there were strange legends clustered about its worn figure, and there existed the belief among certain members of the family that the goddess served as a protective deity. I shuddered at his suggestion of strange legends about Helsa.

As I passed out through the front gate, my eyes were drawn to Helsa's wooden face. There was a slight smile on her mouth, benign, yet contemptuous. Had that smile always been there—had it been there before? I could not remember distinctly, but a warning sense of danger told me no. I hurried directly back to Doctor Stengler.

That was last night.

When I told Doctor Stengler of my unsuccessful interview with old Skuldt, his face darkened with dismay. "Too bad, too bad," he muttered.

"Now what?" I asked distractedly. I was virtually helpless; I needed some one to make my decisions, to point out my path for me.

"I would wait," said the professor finally.

"Wait for what?" I demanded almost angrily. "More horrors? More of this unbearable anxiety?"

He flushed. "Need I suggest that your next step must necessarily be illegal? The image must be burned; how you do it is after all a personal matter."

I laughed bitterly. "Elissa's death was hardly legal. How can I hesitate to destroy the thing that brought about her death?"

The professor urged me into a chair. "All right. But wait a few days. Perhaps in the intervening time we'll find another solution."

He continued to soothe me with his mild voice, and soon convinced me that I should wait. I agreed finally, and left his house, dog-tired.

Would God that I had not agreed! Would God that I had gone directly to the Skuldt estate last night and smashed the image of that hellish goddess to bits and burned them! How much better would it have been if I had not listened to Doctor Stengler, who, in advising me to wait, signed his own death warrant!

How was I in my intense haste and trouble to know that I had been followed from the Skuldt gates? I heard no foot-

steps, I saw nothing behind me, I felt no phantom presence, though once or twice before I had heard the pursuing thing, though I had failed to see it.

THE police came for me not three hours after I had reached my home. I had been the last person to see him alive, for he had been murdered in his study. He, famous philosopher and author, a man without a known enemy in the world, had been ruthlessly slain—beaten to death by an unknown antagonist who carried what must have been a heavy, blunt, wooden weapon, for it was with such a weapon that Doctor Stengler had been brutally killed.

It was I who had killed my friend; for I had given life to Helsa, and surely there could be no question of her hand in the crime! She had taken her revenge on the man who had shown me the way to escape her influence. Once more the carven image had killed.

All day, from midnight on, I have been before the police, stating and restating what I was doing in Doctor Stengler's house last night. The gruelling was endless. If I was weary last night, I am near exhaustion now. What horror this wooden image has brought into my life! If I had heeded her first nocturnal warning, Helsa might have allowed both Elissa and Doctor Stengler to live.

I need not have gone to the Skuldt estate to convince myself of Helsa's part in the death of my friend, yet I went when finally the police released me. It was as if I were drawn there by a powerful magnet. And I was not surprized to see that her bare arms were stained with blood. What there may have been of benignity in her face had fled. Her enigmatic smile was twisted into a mocking leer of hate.

My very life sustains her! There is no further need to wait.

I am going now.

* * * * *

THE preceding paper was found in the home of the late Emmanuel Speers by police investigating his death, a clipped newspaper account of which is here appended:

Emmanuel Speers, instructor in the philosophy department of the University of Wisconsin, was last night strangely murdered while apparently committing an act of vandalism. His body was found by members of the family of Karl Skuldt of 2231 Mendota Court returning from a play.

The dead man lay directly before the front gate of the estate, and the picturesque statue which has always stood in a niche in one of the gateposts was found across his body. The carven image was almost entirely burned.

Evidence indicated that Mr. Speers had liberally covered the image with gasoline, and then set fire to it. In falling from its pedestal, the image evidently killed Mr. Speers, though this is remarkable in view of the fact that the figure was extraordinarily light for its size.

There were mysterious marks about Mr. Speers' throat, and two doctors who have examined him have stated that his death might have been due to strangulation.

It is a remarkable fact that the remains of the arms of the sea goddess, which were normally resting against her shoulders, were found stretched and bent in unnatural positions.

To this brief clipping may be added the fact that two days after Speers' burial beside the body of his wife, the half-burned arms of the sea goddess were found thrust deep into the earth of his grave. The arms were removed from the grave and carried into the small cottage of the cemetery caretaker. One of the arms was burned in the course of the day; the other was left for the night.

The remaining arm was burned immediately after its discovery in the morning of the following day deep in the disturbed earth of Speers' grave. The window of the caretaker's tiny cottage had been broken from the inside.

"She twisted into a half-upright position and glared at him in regal rage."

Golden Blood

By JACK WILLIAMSON

A tale of weird adventures in the hidden land beyond the cruel desert of the Rub' Al Khali, and a golden folk that ride upon a golden-yellow tiger and worship a golden snake

The Story Thus Far

DYNAMITING their schooner behind them on the south coast of Arabia, a little band of desperate adventurers struck out inland, plunging into the hostile mystery of the Rub' Al Khali, the world's cruelest and least-known desert. Their leaders were Price Durand, wealthy American soldier of fortune, Jacob Garth, enigmatic Briton, and Joao de Castro, unsavory Macanese.

Equipped with an army tank, machine-guns, and mountain artillery, and accompanied by the sheikh Fouad el Akmet and his renegade Bedouins, they are raiding the forbidden "golden land," of which they have learned through the whispers of desert Arabs and a strange parchment written by an ancient Spanish *conquistador*.

The hidden land is guarded by the uncanny scientific powers of its weird rulers,

This story began in WEIRD TALES for April

the "golden folk"—a man, an exotic woman, a great, domesticated tiger, and a gigantic snake, all four of which, according to the legends, are of golden metal, yet immortally living.

The Arabs' superstitious fears of the "accursed land" seemed well grounded when three of the golden beings appeared above the barrier mountains, in a phenomenon Price could only describe as a mirage, warning the party to turn back.

Disregarding the warning, Price Durand led the way through the pass, killing a strange Arab who was guarding it with a huge mirror that projected an invisible, deadly beam of cold. Beyond the pass, he looked into the barren fastness of the inner desert, across which continued the trail they have been following—a caravan road marked with human skulls set upon tall poles.

During the battle the terrified Arabs deserted, driving off the camels, leaving the white men at the grim mercy of the Rub' Al Khali desert.

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6. *The White Dromedary*

THE black granite massif of the Jebel Harb was six days behind. Still the order of march was the same: old sheikh Fouad el Akmet upon his *hejin*, leading the caravan along the road of skulls; the endless line of weary camels behind, carrying the Bedouin renegades, the whites of the "Secret Legion," the paraphernalia of modern war; the tank roaring and clanging in the rear.

Two days they had rested at the well in the mountains; the white men, during the first bitter night, alone, unmounted, helpless. But dawn had brought the fugitive Arabs back from their panic-stricken flight, slipping up cautiously to see how the battle had gone. Their situation was nearly as desperate as that of the others, for both camels and men were suffering for water, obviously unable to cover the distance back to the last alkaline well. Convinced, to his own amazement, that the whites had been victorious over the evil *djinn* of the accursed land, old Fouad had been glad to rejoin the expedition.

Twice since they left the range the trail of skulls had led them to brackish, bitter pools. But no living thing had they seen, in this domain of death within the mountain barrier.

The fleet gazelles, the hyenas and prowling jackals, the occasional ostriches of the desert's fringes had long been left behind. In this lifeless land, even the tamarisks and acacia and sere camel-grass were lacking. The ubiquitous desert insects, ants, spiders, scorpions, were rare. The *rakham*, the black-winged vultures that had followed ominously from the mountains, had long since deserted.

It was late afternoon, and the long caravan was winding across one of the ever more frequent red-sand strips, into the selected camping-place for the night, when Price saw the white dromedary.

A magnificent, pure-white animal, resembling the *Unamiya* camels which the El Murra breed in the borders of the Rub' Al Khali, it stood upon a bare red dune two miles off the track. Its rider, a slim, white-clad figure, appeared to be watching the caravan.

Price fumbled quickly for his binoculars, but he had hardly focussed them when the unknown rider vanished silently beyond the red dune.

At the moment Price, as the expedition's leader, was busy with the old sheikh, settling one of the difficulties that had risen as a result of the Arabs' thievish dispositions and the frayed nerves of the whites. Mawson, a little Cockney machine-gunner, had attacked the Arab Hamed with his fists, accusing him of stealing a gold watch and other trinkets

from his pockets, while he slept. Hamed, unable to deny possession of the articles in question, swore that he had found them on the ground, after camp was broken that morning, producing perjured witnesses to substantiate his story.

A routine affair, but one that required diplomatic settling to maintain the harmonious discipline of the expedition. The tents were already up, on a sand-rimmed plane of shale, before the case was finally adjusted, Mawson's valuables being returned, and Hamed dismissed with a warning.

Only then did Jacob Garth inform Price that he had sent three Arabs in pursuit of the lone rider they had seen.

"Don't want our arrival broadcast," the big man said. "Promised the men they could divide the spoil."

The three Bedouins had already returned with the white dromedary, which was a priceless animal, and its rider. The captive was a woman.

"She's something of a beauty," Garth added. "Don't blame de Castro for wanting her."

"What have they done with her?" asked Price.

"The three divided their loot into three shares, and distributed them by lot. Kanja won the girl. He felt rather cheated, because Nur got the camel, which is much more valuable. Ali's share was her outfit: saddle and her clothing and a long golden knife—a sort of straight *jambiyah*.

"Kanja wasn't especially pleased with his share of the spoil. But de Castro saw the woman, while they were dividing up. It seems she struck his fancy; he gave Kanja his binoculars for her. Must have been hit hard—you know how he prized those glasses."

"Where is she now?"

"Joao has her tied in his tent."

"Look here!" cried Price. "We can't tolerate anything like that!"

It was Price's nature to sympathize with the under-dog, with any one mistreated or imposed upon or oppressed merely because some one else was stronger. Jacob Garth's account of the bound girl roused a dull anger in him. And because Price Durand was essentially a man of action, that resentment was to find physical expression.

"We're a long way," Garth observed placidly, "from the white man's law." The pale eyes, the broad, suave, white face, held no feeling.

"But we're still white men!" Price insisted, hotly. Then, realizing that the other was unimpressed, he sought for arguments. "And even with honor and decency aside, it's an unwise way to treat the first citizen of this country that we meet."

"She can't be a very important citizen," Garth opposed, "or she wouldn't be out here alone, half dead for a drink."

"Anyhow, if we treated her fairly, she might be able to give us valuable information."

"She's going to," the huge man said calmly. "Just now she's in a huff, and doesn't want to talk. But Joao de Castro is an artist at coaxing reluctant tongues."

"You don't mean he'd torture a woman!"

"You don't know him."

Price said decisively, "I'm going to see her."

"Better leave her alone," Garth advised, in the same expressionless voice. "Joao will be irritated if you interrupt his amusement. We can't afford to have any trouble."

Without answering, Price strode away toward de Castro's tent, a small, hot flame of anger in his heart.

A LITTLE group of men, whites and Arabs, were gathered in front of the tent. The captured white camel was tied down, near by. Ali was proudly displaying his share of the loot—*abba* of soft white wool, *kamis* and *cherchis* of fine-woven silk, and a thin, golden dagger, whose temper, he was declaring excitedly, was good as any steel. Nur, with gestures and elaborate pantomime, was telling the story of the chase, of the fierceness with which the girl had fought, baring his side to show a skin wound he had received from the yellow dagger.

Kanja stood aside, delightedly fondling the newly won binoculars, grinning with childish pleasure as he peered through them, first from one end of the tubes and then the other.

Price strode through the group to where the Eurasian stood at the lifted flap of the tent, his swarthy, pock-marked face evil with lust. Beside him was his henchman, Pašić, a Montenegrin, who had been mate of the *Iñez,* Joao's schooner. Black, hairy, powerful as a bull, he deserved his usual appellation, "Black Ape."

"I'd like," Price said, "to see your prisoner, de Castro."

"D' bitch, she ess mine," the little Macanese muttered, rather belligerently, in his awkward English.

A moment he stood in front of Price, but his shifty, furtive, oblique eyes fell before Price's stern blue ones. He stepped aside.

The girl lay upon the rough shale beneath the tent. Most of the clothing had been stripped from her—being part of Ali's loot—and her wrists and slender ankles were trussed with rough halter-ropes of camel's hair. Price had known she must be attractive, to tempt the Eurasian to part with his prized binoculars. But her loveliness astonished him.

Young, she was; no more, he guessed, than nineteen. The skin of her fresh, smooth body was whiter than his own. Even the oval face was not deeply tanned; she must, he thought, have worn a veil.

Bound as the girl was, she could not rise. But as Price peered into the tent she twisted into a half-upright position and glared at him in regal rage. Framed in disordered brown hair, her face was delicately strong, red-lipped. Dark her eyes were, violet-blue, and quite devoid of fear.

Without stopping to analyze his emotions—which was a thing he seldom did—Price knew at once that he could not leave her in the hands of the Macanese. And he realized at the same time that Joao would make trouble, rather than lose her.

He started impulsively into the tent, to loosen her ropes. She flung her half-bare body at him, grazed his hand with strong, flashing teeth.

De Castro seized his arm, jerked him from the tent before he could resist. Dark, slanted eyes were snapping with jealous passion.

"She ess mine!" he hissed. "Damn you, keep 'way!"

"De Castro," Price said, "I want you to turn her loose."

The thin yellow hands of the Eurasian trembled.

"Turn 'er loose?" he screamed. "Turn 'er loose, when I geeve for 'er my ver' fine binoc'lar? D' hell!"

"That's all right. I'll pay you for the glasses. Or even give you mine, if you want."

"I want 'er, not d' dam' binoc'lar!"

"I'll give you five hundred dollars——"

"D' hell! What ess money, 'ere?"

"Listen, de Castro," Price said, a new note of authority in his voice. He realized that mild measures had been a mis-

take. "I'm head of this expedition. I order you to untie that girl."

"Dios!" the Eurasian screamed, shaking in a fit of passion.

"Then I'll do it, for you."

Price started into the tent again. De Castro's yellow hand darted into his shirt front. A thin knife flashed up and down.

But Price, knowing well the familiarity of Joao's kind with knives, was alert. He evaded the slashing blade, drove a heavy fist into the pock-marked face. Savage joy filled him at the dull crunch of teeth beneath the blow.

With a bull-like bellow, the Montenegrin charged to the aid of his crony. Leaping upon the unprepared Price, he wound his long, ape-like arms around him, pinioning his arms in a savage embrace, driving his knees up in vicious blows at the loins.

Twisting furiously, but helpless in the arms of the "Black Ape," Price butted uselessly at his flat, hairy face. The Arabs gathered in a ring, applauding enthusiastically.

Pašić threw back his shoulders, dragging Price clear of the ground, helpless and gasping in the ape-like embrace that was forcing the breath from his body. The Montenegrin hitched him up, dextrously changing his hold, and Price knew that the man was about to throw him over his head, probably to fall with a broken back.

Desperately he struggled for a leg-hold, failed, kicked vainly at Pašić's legs. Then an abrupt, savage lunge tore his left arm free from that crushing grasp. Instantly he drove his elbow, with a short, jabbing blow, into the Montenegrin's solar plexus.

The man gasped; the constricting embrace relaxed for an instant. Price tore himself free of the terrible arms, darted away to hitting distance.

The "Black Ape," better provided with strength and savagery than with science, charged again, long arms flinging. A quick one-two to the brutish body stopped him, a dazed expression on his flat face. Another blow, to the jaw, deliberately timed and with all Price's hundred and eighty-two pounds behind it, and the man's knees weakened. He sprawled heavily beside the groaning Eurasian.

Price went into the tent.

7. *Aysa of the Golden Land*

THE bound girl glared at him, angry hate in her violet eyes. She did not recoil from his hands; she revealed no fear—only hot wrath. White teeth flashed at his hands again. He disregarded them, busied himself with the tightly drawn knots in the halter-ropes that held her.

Suddenly she was quiet; the rage in her eyes changed to silent wonder.

The ropes loosened, he chafed her wrists and ankles to restore circulation; then slipped an arm beneath her shoulders and lifted her to her feet from the rough shale upon which she had been thrown.

She stood watching him, curious speculation in her violet eyes.

"Aise, Ali!" Price called, from the doorway of the tent.

The Arab approached, the garments that had been taken from the girl still in his arms.

"Give me this woman's clothing," demanded Price.

The Arab began whining protests. Price repeated the order in sterner tones, and the Arab reluctantly surrendered the garments. He kept the golden dagger thrust in his belt, and hung avidly near.

"Now go!" Price told him shortly.

He turned and proffered the clothing to the girl. Violet eyes wide in mute astonishment, she accepted them mechanically. He looked down at her white,

fresh body. With a little cry, she began slipping into the garments, swiftly and without self-consciousness.

Price watched her until she had dressed, listening to the groans of de Castro and Pašić outside the tent, and the excited clamor of the gathering crowd. Knowing the Macanese would raise trouble as soon as he recovered consciousness, Price was anxious to get the girl away from his vicinity.

When she was ready, he took her hand, led her from the tent. After a questioning look at him, she followed willingly. Outside, however, at sight of her recent persecutors, her rage flared up again. Jerking away from him, she darted upon Ali, and snatched the golden dagger from his belt. In a moment she was above Joao, who was groaning and struggling to sit up.

"Bismillah! Laan'abuk!" cursed Ali, leaping after her to recover the dagger, which had struck his fancy because of the phenomenal hardness of its yellow metal. Seizing her arm, as she raised the blade above the Macanese, he twisted it back, painfully.

A suppressed cry of agony broke from the girl's lips; her face went white. She dropped the weapon, just as Price's fist crushed against Ali's jaw.

The Bedouin staggered away, spitting blood. The girl was biting her lip; the twisted arm hung limp. But, with the other hand, she snatched for the golden dagger.

De Castro's yellow claw was ahead of her.

Price put his foot on Joao's wrist, bent and wrenched the weapon from his hand. Seizing the girl firmly by the shoulder, he led her unresisting away, toward his own tent.

Several of the watching men started to follow. He turned, ordered them curtly back. They gathered sympathetically around Joao. Though Price had won the girl's release, he realized the victory was only for the moment; her position was still precarious.

As usual, the tank had been stopped near Price's tent. Sam Sorrows, the lean old Kansan who drove it, was watching from beside it.

"Trouble in the camp, Sam," Price told him briefly.

"Over the woman?"

Price nodded.

"Thought so. Damn' queer place, this, for a woman. But I reckon one could make trouble anywhere."

"It isn't her fault."

"It never is."

"Sam, I'd like to get back in the machine and stand guard with the machine-guns for a while. There's mutiny afoot."

"Okay, Mr. Durand." The lanky old man grinned, as if the likelihood of fighting were enjoyable, and climbed into the tank.

PRICE led the girl to his tent, indicated that she might enter. A moment she studied his face, with wondering violet eyes. Then she smiled, and slipped inside.

For a little time Price studied the disorganized confusion of the camp about him, on the little plain among red sand-dunes. He was near the center of the camp. Tents, piles of dunnage, saddles, kneeling camels, were scattered all around him. The crowd of men about de Castro was still increasing. Price's heart sank as he realized the inevitability of conflict. Of all the seventy men about him, Sam Sorrows was the only one he trusted.

Picking up a canteen of water, Price entered the tent. The girl was waiting, tense, white-faced, just within. He unscrewed the top of the canteen, shook it so that the water sloshed audibly, and held it out to the girl. Eagerly she put

her lips to it, drank until Price, fearing she would make herself sick with too much water, took it away.

She laughed at him questioningly; he grinned.

Then it happened: her tortured nerves gave way. She broke suddenly into a storm of weeping. Understanding that it was only the natural reaction to her relief, and yet uncertain what to do, he went toward her, touched her shoulder, pityingly.

Shaken with uncontrollable sobs, she buried her face trustfully against his shoulder. Her brown hair, fragrantly soft, brushed against his face. Then she was in his arms.

The tempest of weeping ceased as abruptly as it had begun. The girl slipped away from Price, composed again, drying her eyes upon the corner of her *cherchis*. Seeing that she looked exhausted, Price spread a blanket on the tent-floor and invited her, with a gesture, to sit down; which she did, with a grateful glance.

"Do you speak Arabic?" Price asked her, kindly.

A moment she hesitated; then understanding dawned in her violet eyes.

"Yes!" she affirmed. "That is the tongue of my people, though you speak it oddly."

Her Arabic was clearly comprehensible, though it had a curious inflection. It was more nearly akin, plainly, to the classic language than to any modern dialect that Price knew. But its forms were older, even, than the classic. The girl spoke the Arabic of many centuries ago!

"You are welcome," Price told her. "I am truly sorry you were treated so. I hope to make amends."

"*Birkum* [I thank you]," she replied, with so close an approximation to the modern accent that Price followed without difficulty. "I am very grateful for your rescue."

It was on his lips to tell her that the rescue was still far from complete. But it would be unkind, he thought, to worry her needlessly with the true gravity of the situation. He smiled, then asked:

"Your people are near?"

She pointed northward. "That way lies El Yerim. It is three days by camel."

"Don't worry about it," he urged. "I'll see that you get safely back."

Her violet eyes widened with fear. "But I can not go back," she cried. "They would give me up to the golden folk."

"You are in trouble, besides this?" She nodded.

Price invited: "Tell me about it."

"You are strangers. You know not the golden folk?"

"No. We come from a far land."

"Well," she explained, "the golden folk are beings of gold that dwell in a mountain near El Yerim. Malikar, who is a man of gold—or a god. Vekyra, who is his—well, wife. The golden tiger, upon which they ride to hunt. And the yellow snake, which is the ancient god, and the greatest of the four."

"I see. Go on."

"Every harvest season, Malikar comes down to El Yerim, upon the tiger, to select the grain and the dates, the young camels, and the slaves, that shall be sent as offering to the snake-god.

"Five days ago he came. All the people of El Yerim were gathered by Yarmud, the king. And Malikar rode among them on the tiger, choosing those he would take for slaves. He saw me, and commanded that I be sent with the camels and the grain, on the next day.

"That night my house was guarded. Though the priests say it is an honor to be offered to the snake, few take it so." The girl smiled wearily. "I tricked the guards, and slipped out into the night. In the fields I found the camel that was

my father's, and rode away into the desert.

"Four days I have ridden. And I was able to bring little water or food."

Price squatted on his heels, lighting a cigarette—which operation she watched with evident astonishment—as he digested her words. Her story excited his curiosity immensely; but he felt that it would be unkind to question her at much length, dead-tired as she obviously was. But one thing he must ask:

"This tiger, and the golden people—are they really gold? Living metal?"

"I know not. It is strange that metal should have life. But they are the color of gold. They are stronger than men. They do not die—they have lived since Anz was great."

"Anz?" Price caught eagerly at the name of the lost city of the legends. Was Anz, after all, no myth, but sober fact?

"Anz," the girl explained, "was the great city where once my people lived; they still call themselves the Beni Anz. Long ago the rains came every year, and all this land was green. But a thousand years ago the desert conquered Anz, and the sands rolled over it, and my people came to the oasis at El Yerim."

And the girl added, "I was searching for Anz."

"Why, if it is deserted?"

She hesitated, reluctantly. Her weary eyes studied him.

"No matter——" Price began, and her words rushed swiftly:

"You may think me foolish—but there is a prophecy. The last great king of Anz was Iru. A brave warrior he was, and a just man. Tall, like you." The violet eyes dwelt upon Price. "And his eyes were blue, like yours, and his hair red. The legend speaks of those matters, for most of my people are dark," she explained.

"And the prophecy?" Price asked.

"Perhaps it is an idle tale." Again she paused, then continued with a rush: "But according to the legend, Iru is not dead. He still sleeps in the halls of his palace, in the lost city. He waits for some one to come and wake him. Then he will come out again with his great ax, and slay the golden folk, and free the Beni Anz."

"Do you believe the legend?" asked Price, smiling.

"No," she denied. "Yet I do not know. It might be true. By the legend, you see, it is a woman of my name who should go to wake the king." And she added: "When I had fled from El Yerim, I had nowhere else to go."

The girl caught herself nodding, jerked back upright, smiling wanly at Price.

"One thing more, and you may sleep," he said. "What is your name?"

"Aysa," she whispered. "And I shall call you——"

"Price Durand." And he murmured softly, "Aysa. Aysa of the golden land."

She smiled, and was suddenly asleep, sitting half upright. Price rose and laid her softly upon his blankets, in a comfortable position. She did not wake when he moved her, but she smiled vaguely in her sleep.

"SEE here, Durand, we want to stop this muddle before it makes more trouble," Jacob Garth greeted Price, as he walked up to the tent. Joao de Castro and Pašić were close behind him, nursing bruised faces, muttering unpleasantly together. Fouad followed, and a crowd of other men, whites and Arabs, most of them eyeing Price with unconcealed hostility.

Price stepped to meet them, trying to assume a confidence that he did not feel.

"Of course," he agreed, "we don't want any trouble."

"You'll have to return Joao's woman," said Garth, his voice blandly sonorous, expressionless. His pouchy, broad face, still oddly tallow-white, as if the desert sun had never touched it, was blank as a mask. Unwinking, unfeeling, the small, pale eyes stared at Price.

"The girl isn't his property," Price stated, stiffly.

"Dios!" howled de Castro. "Do I pay for d' bitch, to 'ave heem rob me?"

Jacob Garth waved a puffy, white hand. "That's all right, Joao. We're going to settle this. . . . Durand, he did trade fairly for the woman. You can't appropriate her for yourself, in this high-handed way. The men won't stand for it."

"I don't propose," said Price, "to have the girl mistreated."

Garth moved ponderously forward, his voice rolled out persuasively:

"Listen, Durand. We're after big stakes. A fortune is waiting for us. Many fortunes! A bigger strike than men have ever dreamed of. We've got to stand together; we can't afford a quarrel."

"I'm willing to do anything reasonable. I'll pay de Castro whatever you think he should have."

"It isn't a question of money. Not with the gold practically at our finger-tips. Surely you don't want to spoil our chances, for the sake of a woman. What's one native slut, against the loot of the golden land?"

"Please don't refer to her that way!" Price demanded, sharply. "After all, I'm the leader of this expedition. When I say hands off, it is hands off! De Castro is *not* going to have the girl!"

He was immediately sorry for the flare of anger, for it brought lowering looks from the men. To repair the damage, he turned to the little knot of whites and spoke pleadingly:

"See here, fellows, I want to do the right thing by all of you. I don't want to deal unfairly by de Castro. I'll give him my binoculars in place of those he traded for the girl. I don't want her for myself——"

Rude, derisive laughter broke out. Trying to hide his rising anger beneath a smile, he went on:

"Surely you don't want to see a helpless woman manhandled——"

"Enough of that," Garth cut in. "You must realize that these are men, not Sunday school children."

"Men, I hope, and not beasts."

His appeal met no sympathy. These were a hard sort: no others would have been attracted by this desperate raid into the desert's heart. Many of them were outside the law. Hardship and fear and greed had ridden down whatever of chivalry they might have had.

The faintest hint of a sardonic smile crossed Jacob Garth's placid, red-bearded face.

"Has it occurred to you, Durand," his question rolled out deliberately, "that you have just about lived out your usefulness as our leader? It's possible, you know, that we could do without you—now there are no more checks to be signed."

"The double-cross, eh?" said Price, scornfully.

Garth heaved his massive shoulders. "If you like. I came into this infernal desert for gold. I'm not going to let any native hussy stop me. Or any foolish convention."

"De Castro will not touch the girl," Price said evenly, in steel-cold tones, "so long as I am alive. *Now* what do you say?"

"I don't want any bloodshed, Durand. And I see that Sorrows is covering us

from the tank. We'll make a peaceable bargain."

"What's that?"

"You can keep the jade tonight. I talked de Castro into letting you have her first. In the morning, you can turn her over to him."

"I'll do nothing of the kind."

"Think it over," Garth advised blandly. "If you don't decide to be reasonable, we'll take her. I'll hate to part company with you, Durand. You're a good man, and that's what we need. But you can't wreck the expedition. Think it over!"

8. *"La Siwa Hu"*

PRICE DURAND was not the kind who can surrender gracefully, even to overwhelming opposition. He had sometimes wished that he could give way meekly to circumstances as some men do; it would have made life, at times, much more convenient. But some obscure quirk, deep in his nature, made him a fighter. Resistance to his will had always roused in him a dogged determination not to yield.

Submission was left out of his nature. When opposed, it was impossible for him to do anything but fight, with every resource at his command. Nor was he given to weighing the consequences of defeat. His fatalistic faith in the Durand luck was supreme. And that luck had never failed—probably because invincible resourcefulness had never given it a chance.

When the men had gone, Price looked back into his tent. Aysa lay still upon the blankets, breathing quietly. Her oval face was half toward him, fresh, lovely, pomegranate lips a little parted. Long lashes lay on her cheeks, ruddy brown.

One glance was enough to steel his determination not to surrender her to the insidious Macanese. His blood boiled at thought of such sleeping loveliness despoiled by the swarthy Eurasian. No, he was not going to give her up. He had until morning to find some way to save her—unless Joao de Castro, in the meantime, found an opportunity to murder him.

The yellow moon, at the first quarter, hung near the zenith at dusk. Through the first half of the night, Price waited impatiently at his tent, near the slumbering, exhausted girl.

Sam Sorrows had cheerfully offered to remain on guard, in the tank. Price accepted gratefully, and gave him, as a dubious token of appreciation, the key to the chest of gold in the tank. Price had decided to leave the caravan, with the girl; that seemed the only course open except disgraceful submission: two men could not fight the whole expedition.

The camp slowly fell into sleep, until the only movement was that of the regular sentries, two whites and two Arabs, pacing along their beats beyond the kneeling camels, hailing one another occasionally.

Near midnight the reddened moon sank beyond undulating dunes, its brief glow faded; and Price was ready to put his plane into action.

With a whispered word to Sam Sorrows, he slipped noiselessly away into starlight darkness. Silently, he saddled his own camel, which was kneeling near, found two full skins of water and slung them to the high pommels, with a small bag of grain for the beast.

Returning to the tent, he packed his saddle-bags. Chocolate. Hard-tack. Dried meat. Rolls of the tough, dried apricot pulp which the Arabs call "mare's hide." Emergency medical kit. Binoculars. Extra ammunition for rifle and automatic.

When all was ready, he sat listening to the girl's regular breathing, reluctant to disturb her. At last he dared delay no longer. Gently he roused her, cautioning her to silence.

In complete darkness—for a light would have alarmed the camp—he gave her food and water. Sometimes his moving hands met hers; he found the contact vaguely exciting.

"The men with me say that I must give you back to him from whom I took you," he whispered. "I can not fight them all, so we are going away."

"Where?"

"To Anz, perhaps? You were going there."

"I was. But Anz is dead, a city of ghosts. No living man has even seen it." Her soft whisper went husky. "I do not want you to die, my protector. Let me go alone."

"No, I'm going along to look out for you. But don't talk about dying. You can count on the Durand luck."

"But my enemies are many — and strong. My own people will hunt me, to escape the wrath of the golden folk. And Malikar is seeking me upon the yellow tiger, pursuing me with . . . *the shadow!*"

"Let's go," said Price. Lifting the saddle-bags, he slipped from the tent. Aysa followed silently, clutching her golden dagger.

PRICE paused to bid Sam Sorrows a silent, grateful farewell, then guided the girl to his kneeling camel.

"Mount," he whispered.

"Wait," Aysa demurred. "Perhaps I can find my own animal. Listen!"

For minutes they stood still. The camp lay dark in the pallid light of the desert stars. Black tents looming here and there. Camels, kneeling or grotesquely sprawled. Dim forms of men sleeping in the open, wrapped only in their *abbas*.

A mysterious murmur of sound floated on the darkness. The breathing of men. The low, dismal groans of resting camels. The occasional tinkling of a camel-bell. The distant cries of the sentries. It all had a stranger undertone, for the dawn-wind had risen, and creeping sand whispered across the dunes beyond the camp, with a muted and eery sussuration.

Aysa moved suddenly, murmured, "The bell of my camel!"

Noiselessly she slipped away in the darkness, guided by the faint tinkle that Price had not even heard.

He started to follow, alarmed. Then he came back to his own mount, stood tense, listening, waiting. The subdued and slumberous noises of the camp drifted about him, and the faint dry sibilance of moving sand, as if the ghosts of this dead land had been wakened by the dawn-wind.

Price had not realized the hold that Aysa, in a few brief hours, had gained upon his feelings, until Nur's harsh scream of alarm splintered the murmurous silence of the somnolent camp. The sound stabbed him like a blade. He felt weakness, almost physical sickness, of fear and despair. For a moment he was trembling, shaken with such a chill of fear for the girl's sake as he had never felt for his own.

Then strength and determination flowed back into him. He leapt into the saddle of his camel, hastened it to its feet, snatched out his automatic.

The Arab Nur, he realized, must have been sleeping near his newly acquired camel, and had been roused as Aysa prepared to mount the animal.

Instantly the camp was in uproar. Men sprang up, shouting. Camels grumbled in alarm, leapt up and ran about, three-

legged. Flashlight beams burst from the tents of the whites. Reports of wildly fired guns punctuated astonished curses in several European tongues, and impassioned appeals to Allah in the name of his prophet.

Through the confusion a white dromedary came dashing, Aysa clinging to it, flourishing the golden dagger with which she must have cut its hobbles.

"Aiee, Price Durand!" her voice pealed, and Price thought there was eager exultation in it.

Price swung his *hejin* in beside her own, racing toward the edge of the camp.

"Shaytan el Kabir!" Nur shrieked behind them. "After them! My camel! *Effendi* Duran' and the woman!"

Calm, reverberant, Jacob Garth's voice rang out in a command to the sentries: "Müller! Mawson! Stop them!"

A bullet hummed close to Price's ears, and he heard the shrill, excited screaming of Joao de Castro: "Catch heem! D' thief!"

Price and Aysa plunged through the outskirts of the camp. The sentries, on foot, ran toward them, sought them with flashlight beams, fired wildly.

"Lean low," Price called to the girl, "and ride!"

A little breathless laugh answered him. And her clear voice pealed out in a mocking farewell to her enemies, *"Wa'salem!"*

"Mount!" the old sheikh Fouad howled behind them. *"Bismillah!* Pursue them."

"I geef my rifle," de Castro shouted, "to 'ooever bring back d' bitch!"

Riding side by side, the two were well beyond the sentries. Before them lay mystic, starlit desert. They raced their camels for the temporary safety of the tawny darkness.

Behind came a confusion of shouts, the *"Yahh! Yahh!* [Go! Go!]" of men urging on the mounts, the swift thudding of many feet.

Price turned in his saddle. Faintly, by starlight, he could see the dark mass of the pursuers, only a few hundred yards behind. Half the camp was following, spreading out in a great fan.

His heart sank in despair. There was little chance of escape, he knew, with their followers so near. Even if they could evade capture until daylight, the Arabs, skilled in the art of *asar,* or enemy-tracking, would soon hunt them down.

Still running side by side, they topped the first dune. In the moment they were silhouetted against the stars, a scattered volley of shots crackled behind them.

As their mounts ran down the slope, Price did a thing that surprized himself. Leaning toward the girl, he called:

"Aysa of the golden land, I must tell you something now, because I'll never have another chance. You are beautiful —and brave!"

The girl laughed. "They'll never catch us. We have all the desert! They are dogs hunting eagles!"

Then he heard the bellow of the tank's engine, as it burst into roaring life; the clangor of its metal treads as it thundered across the rocky plain; the clattering music of its guns.

Could the old Kansan be joining their pursuers? Of course not! Sam Sorrows was doing the one thing that could save them.

"Good old Sam!" Price cried. "Giving them something else to worry over."

The Arabs, he knew, still held their deadly fear of the tank. Its lumbering charge into their midst would scatter them in frantic terror. And none of the whites yet rode well enough to be a serious menace.

Whine of motor, rattle of guns and outcry of men were faint behind when

they topped the second long dune. Beyond the third, and the only sound was the dry rustle of creeping sand in the cool dawn-wind, ghost-murmurings of the dead world about them.

THE first red glow of Arabian day found the two alone, still riding side by side. Their weary camels were plodding slowly across a dead plain of alkali, leprously white, and crunched underfoot with a sound like crushed snow.

Ahead lay another drear range of bare, irregular red-sand dunes, bloody in the sunrise. Vast, terrible horizons surrounded them. Low, far black hills, granite skeletons of ancient mountains. Billowing miles of dead drift-sand. Lifeless salt-pans shimmering unreal like ghosts of the lakes they once had been.

Already the smoky horizons quivered in unending undulations of heat, and the silvery mock-lakes of the morning mirage flowed across the flickering, infernal plains, rippling in tantalizing promises of cool refreshment, fleeing away to merge into the bright sky.

The camp was many miles behind, and the rustling sands of the dawn-wind had already obscured their trail. They had lost even the caravan road that was marked with skulls. They were two alone, with the tawny and unconquerable wilderness, fighting the deadly, hostile loneliness of the Empty Abode.

"La Siwa Hu," Price murmured a name of the Arabs for the desert, which means "Where there is none but Him."

9 *The City of the Sands*

ON THE evening of the third day they were toiling across an endless, billowing ocean of yellow-red sand. Camels near dead, water-skins almost empty, Price and Aysa rode on, in quest of ancient Anz. Their mouths were dry, and they did not often speak, for the parching air was like hot sand in the throat. But Price looked often at the girl, clinging to her *hejin* wearily but with invincible determination.

The oval face beneath her white *kafiyeh* was blistered, the full lips cracked and bleeding from sun and alkali dust, the tired violet eyes inflamed by the pressure of glaring light. But still Aysa was beautiful, and she smiled at him with courage on her weary face.

Cruel, those three days had been. Yet Price regretted them only for the hardship the girl had so stoically suffered. An odd contentment filled him; his old, bitter *ennui* was dead. Aysa's companionship had become a precious thing, worth the living of a life.

She was the guide, finding the way by obscure landmarks that she knew by tradition alone. At sunset she turned to him, troubled.

"Anz should be before us," she whispered, husky with thirst. "We should have seen it from the last ridge."

"Don't worry, little one!" He had tried to speak cheerfully, but his voice croaked false and hollow. "We'll find it."

"Anz should be right here," she insisted. "My father taught me the signs, before he died, as his father taught him. It should be here."

Perhaps, Price thought, the lost city *was* here. According to Aysa's story, none of her people had seen it for a thousand years. It might be beneath them, completely buried! But he kept the thought to himself.

"Let's ride on," he said. And he pretended to discover with surprize the few drops of water in the goatskin—his own share, which he had saved when they last drank. After a single sparing sip, she suspected the heroic subterfuge, and would take no more.

They goaded the weary camels on, as the inflamed, sullen eye of the sun went out. And still they went on, in an eldritch world of pallid moonlight, sometimes walking and driving the exhausted animals, until they collapsed of thirst and fatigue and despair, to sleep fitfully.

Dawn came and they saw Anz.

THE black walls, of Cyclopean basalt blocks, stood half a mile away. Driven sands of ages had scored in them deep furrows. Here and there they had tumbled into colossal ruin, like a breakwater broken by the yellow sea of sand. Tawny, billowing dunes were piled against them in crested waves, sometimes completely covering them. Shattered ruins rose within the walls, crumbling, half buried, darkly mysterious in the dawn, emerging grim and desolate from night's shadows as if from the mists of centuries immemorial.

Price roused Aysa to point it out. But his hopes sank swiftly after the first thrill of discovery. Anz was truly a city of death, sand-shrouded, forgotten. Little chance, he thought, of finding in this dark necropolis the water for which every tissue of their bodies screamed.

Aysa was filled with new eagerness.

"Then I was not lost," she cried. "Let us enter the walls!"

They urged the unwilling camels to their feet, and toiled toward Anz.

Black walls breasted the conquering sand, massive, forbidding. The gates, mighty panels of patina-darkened bronze, were closed between their guarding towers, red sand banked so high against them that a thousand men could not have pushed them open.

Driving the staggering camels to the crest of a dune that had overflowed the wall, they saw the city within. A city strange as a dream. A dead city, buried in sand.

A ruined and leaning tower rose here above the red dust, like the end of a rotting bone. A shattered dome of white marble, there, like an age-bleached skull. Or a cupola of corroded metal, monument above some buried building.

Over the silent mounds of the sand-beleaguered city Price sensed a brooding spirit of slumberous antiquity, a clinging ghost of the forgotten past. One instant, in imagination, he saw the ruined buildings whole again, saw the broad streets cleared of sand, magnificent thoroughfares thronged with eon-dead multitudes. He saw Anz as it once had been, before dead Petra was carved from the rocks of Edom, before Babylon rose upon the Euphrates, before the first pharaohs reared their enduring mausoleums upon the Nile.

One moment he saw Anz living. Then its sand-conquered, time-shattered wreck smote him with a melancholy sense of death and dissolution.

Aysa sighed hopelessly.

"Then the prophecy is a jest," she whispered. "Anz is truly dead. Iru could not be waiting here! 'Tis a city of the sands!"

"But we may find water." Price tried to seem hopeful. "There must be wells, or reservoirs."

They made the camels slide down the dune, into the old city, and began the weary and seemingly futile search of its forest of ruins.

It was near noon when they approached a huge pile of shattered marble, standing upon a vast platform of titanic basalt blocks, not yet completely covered by the sifting sand. The flagging camels refused to climb the yielding sand-slopes to the platform, and they left them, to explore the building in search of a well.

Price afterward cursed himself for not taking his rifle and the holster containing his automatic, which were slung to the pommels of his saddle. But he was almost too weary to stand. And Anz appeared so completely a city of the dead he had no thought of living enemies.

They clambered to the crumbling platform, and stood beneath a broken colonnade. Aysa studied a half-obliterated inscription on the architrave, turned to Price with weary eagerness, whispering:

"This is the palace of Iru! The king of the legend, who sleeps."

They passed the columns, entered the arched gateway to the palace courtyard.

"Al Hamdu Lillah!" breathed Price, incredulous.

In the court, surrounded by high walls that the sand had not overwhelmed, their senses were struck by the cool green fragrance of a sunken garden. Within the inclosure was a tiny, bright oasis, a wondrous tropic garden in the heart of grimmest desolation, richly and blessedly green.

With sweetest music, crystal water trickled from a stone-rimmed fountain at the end of the court, to spread among a thick jungle of date-palms and fig-trees, of pomegranates and vines and fragrant-flowering shrubs.

The garden was wild, untended. For a thousand years, by Aysa's story, no human being had seen it; these plants must have propagated themselves for generations.

For a moment Price was unbelieving. This wonder of greenery, this song of falling water, was impossible! Stuff of desert-fevered dreams.

Then with a hoarse, gasping cry, he took Aysa by the arm, and they ran down the crumbling granite steps, unused for a thousand years, to the floor of the hidden garden. Together, they fell on their knees at the fountain's lip, rinsed bitter dust from their mouths, drank deep of sweet cool water.

To Price the next hour was a glad dream; a mad riot of delicious sensation, of drinking clear water, of laving the stinging desert grime from his drawn body, of filling himself with fresh, delightful fruits, of resting beside joyous, laughing Aysa in soothing green shade.

Then he remembered the camels, and they went out together to bring the exhausted beasts into this desert paradise. An involuntary cry of dismay broke from Price's lips as he came to the edge of the basalt platform, and looked down upon the kneeling *hejins*.

The animals were where they had been left. But the saddle-bags had been torn open, contents ransacked, part of it scattered about over the sand. The rifle and the automatic, which Price had left slung to his saddle, were gone.

10. In the Crypts of Anz

THE pillaging of the saddle-bags remained a mystery. Peering about the dead city, after he made the discovery, Price was able to see no living being. Utter silence clung to him, tense, expectant . . . but nothing happened.

Pushing away their sense of lurking danger, Price and Aysa presently returned their attention to the camels. With some difficulty, Aysa tugging at the halter-ropes, Price pushing and goading from the rear, they got the animals one by one upon the platform, and turned them into the sunken garden.

Then Price took Aysa's golden dagger, their only remaining weapon, and cut himself a heavy club, in the garden.

They rested again, lying beside the fountain, until sunset, and then ventured out again, to find what had become of the

pilfered weapons. Somewhat refreshed, and driven by haunting fear, they thoroughly explored the sand-heaped, crumbling piles of the lost city, without finding any inhabitants, or, indeed, any habitable place.

Yet there was no denying that the guns were gone.

In the dusk they were returning to the sunken garden when Aysa seized Price's shoulder in a grasp nerved with terror, and pointed silently.

A strange figure was darting away from the colonnade before the entrance—a tall man, lean as a desert Arab, attired in a long, hooded, burnoose-like robe that was a peculiar shade of blue. As he ran along the platform, sprang off into the sand, Price saw that he carried the stolen rifle.

A moment he paused, looking back. On his forehead, above his cruel, hatchet face, was a glittering golden brand, the yellow likeness of a coiled serpent. Then he vanished, beyond a broken column.

"A snake-man," whispered Aysa, her voice muted with fear.

"A what?" Price took her trembling hand, looked into her distressed violet eyes.

"A slave of the snake, under Malikar. The golden man must have known of the prophecy that a woman named Aysa would wake Iru. He guessed that I had fled to Anz, and sent the priest here to capture me."

Price was staring at her in some astonishment. Aysa frightened was a new experience to him. As the helpless prisoner of the Macanese she had revealed no fear. He was shocked to see her white-faced, trembling, her violet eyes wide and sick with terror.

While he himself was much disturbed by the loss of the weapons, he did not believe they were in immediate danger. The blue-robe had fled from them.

"Buck up, kid," he told her. "It can't be that bad. When everything else goes wrong, we still have the Durand luck."

She moved toward him a little, and he put his arm around her, still peering alertly into the gloom swift-falling upon the shattered skeleton of the lost city. She drew herself against him with an eager little movement, murmuring softly *"M'almé!"*

From that time until the end she was apprehensive, fearful. Shadows of strange dread lurked always in her violet eyes. She tried to forget, to laugh with Price. But her gayety was strained, unnatural, feverish.

A WEEK went by, and the snake-man was seen no more. The two were so near supreme happiness! The oasis was a garden of wonder, supplying all physical needs. They would have been content to forget the outer world, dwell there for ever. Each found in the other a joy never known before, a bliss made only more keenly poignant by the intruding darkness of anxiety.

In the rear wall of the courtyard was the arched entrance to a long hall of granite, that led back into the sand-heaped, crumbling main pile of the old palace. Near the garden it was bright enough, illuminated by high, unglazed clerestory windows. Farther back, however, the invading sand had completely covered it. It became a dark tunnel into mysterious, buried ruin.

They had explored it as far as daylight penetrated, and since it furnished the only standing roof available, they made the outer end of it their dwelling.

Above the end of the hall was a stone tower, still standing, so high that it overlooked the walls of Anz. Price was able

to climb its crumbling stair. Several times daily he ascended, to scan the ruins of Anz and the surrounding desert for Aysa's enemies.

On the morning of the ninth day Price saw a tiny speck creeping across the heaving oceans of yellow-reddish dunes, northward. He watched it for an hour, until it had grown to a tiny yellow animal, with a black dot upon its back, running toward the buried city.

"I see that yellow tiger coming," he told Aysa, when he rejoined her in the green shadows of the marble-walled garden.

He could see that the information threw her into an extremity of terror. Her face went white, and she trembled, though she retained her composure.

"It's Malikar!" she whispered, "riding himself after me, upon the tiger. *M'almé*, we must hide! With your weapons gone, we can not fight the golden man! Where——"

Price nodded toward the end of the long hall.

"What about that? I've been wanting to explore it, anyhow."

The girl shook her head. "No, we would be trapped there, in the dark." Then another idea evidently overtook her. "But no matter!" she cried. "Let us hasten!"

Each gathered an armful of the rude torches they had made—merely bundles of dried palm-leaves. And they set out down the hall.

The floor, sifted with red sand, was twenty feet wide; the arched roof thirty feet above. For many yards there was light enough from the entrance and the high windows. Then they entered the main pile of the palace, a mountain of tumbled, sand-covered ruin.

Lighting the torches, they went on, through the darkness and the utter silence of a city entombed. Their feet trod soundlessly upon the sand; instinctively they spoke only in whispers.

Dark, narrower passages opened at intervals from the long central hall. They paused to peer down each. Most of them were filled with sand that had sifted from above; a few were blocked with fallen masonry.

At last, hundreds of feet from the entrance, the central hall ended in a blank stone wall. Price was discouraged; they had found neither hiding-place nor fortress; the hall seemed only a gloomy trap. Aysa eagerly led the way into the last branching passage.

It was a smaller, lower hall, almost free of sand. They had followed it a hundred feet when they passed a pile of moldering wood that once had been a door. Beyond, a steep flight of steps led downward. Complete darkness and breathless silence mocked them from below.

Price could not keep his imagination from conjuring up weird fantasms, upon that black stair, leading into the bowels of a city that had been lost a thousand years. He hesitated, went on only when Aysa moved to pass him.

Three hundred steps downward, and they entered the crypts.

A gloomy labyrinth beneath the buried city; long halls, intricately winding, hewn in dark rock. The stagnant air was dank, laden with dusty odors of the tomb, but not actually dangerous, Price knew, since the torches continued to flare.

They stopped at the foot of the stair, peered rather apprehensively about. The torches were far too feeble to illuminate the vast chambers. Grotesque shadows flickered, leapt at them like dancing demons.

"I believe I'd rather meet Malikar out-

side," Price whispered. "Suppose the torches went out!"

Shadows danced like demons in the winding, pillared halls, and a taunting echo mocked: ". . . *the torches went out . . .*"

"We are in the crypts of Anz!" Aysa cried. "The tombs of the ancient great ones! Iru is sleeping here!"

Ghostly echoes whispered, ". . . *Iru is sleeping here . . .*"

Price shuddered. Above ground, in daylight, it had been easy enough to laugh at the prophecy that an ancient king would wake again; but in these dank, uncanny catacombs, whose lurking darkness was always leaping to battle with the torchlight, the thing seemed grimly possible.

Rather reluctantly, Price accompanied Aysa as she began a circuit of the walls, pausing to study the inscriptions upon the narrow, upright slabs of dark stone that were the doors of tombs.

"The vault of Iru!" she cried suddenly, and Price started.

It was a low, narrow door of stone, with a knob of dull gold. She turned the knob, motioned Price to set his shoulder to it. He hesitated, and she moved to try her own strength with it.

THE door swung inward upon silent hinges, when he lunged against it, more easily than he had expected. He fell into the tomb. Aysa followed anxiously, in response to his startled cry. It was a small, square chamber, hewn in dark rock. On a long, shelf-like niche in the farther wall were the remains of Iru.

To Price's relief, the old king was extremely dead. Only the bare skeleton remained.

On the end of the ledge lay his weapons: a folded skirt of chain-mail, the interlocking links golden, finely wrought; a small, oval shield, to be carried on the left arm; and a great battle-ax.

Eagerly, Price picked up the ax: here, at least, was a weapon. The heavy, massive head was gold, untarnished. Its keen, curving blade, half as long as the handle, was engraved, like the sword of tempered gold in Jacob Garth's possession, with inscriptions in a language Price could not read.

The short, thick helve was of ebony, or some similar black, hard wood. It seemed perfectly preserved. Worn or carved in it was the impression of a hand, a rounded groove for each finger.

Price lifted it, as if to swing it. And those grooves fitted his fingers perfectly, as if the ax were made for his hand, not that of the skeleton beside him, dead a thousand years and more.

"Queer," he muttered. "Just fits my hand."

"Even so," Aysa whispered. "It is strange—or is it strange?"

Puzzled by something in her voice, he looked up at the girl. She stood just within the tiny, rock-hewn tomb, the flaring torches in her hands. She was smiling, framed against the blackness of the crypts, her violet eyes suddenly mysterious with some enigmatic thought.

Price had never seen her so beautiful as there against the gloom of the catacombs. The sheer loveliness of her made his heart ache; made him want to take her in his arms again, and kiss her; made him want desperately to carry her away from the weird perils gathering about them, to some fat place of security and peace.

"Let's get out of here," he muttered.

Aysa turned, and stopped with a horrified gasp, as the torchlight fell upon a man in the doorway behind her—a tall, hatchet-faced man, upon whose high fore-

head glittered the golden likeness of a coiled serpent!

PRICE leapt at the intruder, whirling the golden battle-ax, which he still had been carrying in his hand. And if Aysa had displayed fright, the snake-man betrayed abject terror. His mouth fell open. His thin, cruel features were distorted with the utmost horror that Price had ever seen upon a human face. Shrieking, hands flung up, he staggered backward, and ran into the black, labyrinthin catacombs.

"A slave of the snake," Aysa whispered. "Malikar sent him down to search for me."

"What scared him so? He looked as if he'd seen—I don't know what!"

"I think I know," Aysa said quietly. "He saw Iru awakened."

"Iru awakened? What do you mean?"

"In you the prophecy is fulfilled!" she cried, her violet eyes shining. "You are Iru, come back to conquer the golden folk and deliver the Beni Anz!"

"I? Of course not! Nonsense!"

"Why not? You are tall, as Iru was, red-haired, blue-eyed. Did not the ax fit your hand?"

It *was* something of a coincidence. But Price had always looked askance upon theories of reincarnation. He felt that one life was load enough, without attempting to assume the burdens of the dead.

"Anyhow," Aysa added practically, "it will help for the snake-man to think you are Iru. Why not put on the mail?"

"I'll be anything, sweetheart," Price assured her, "to get you out of this."

"And perhaps you should learn the ax-song, written on the blade," she suggested. "Iru always sang it in battle."

By torchlight, she read the words to him. Their strange, chanting rhythm oddly stirred his blood. He could render them only roughly into English:

Hew—
Justice in battle!
Foe of all evil!

Strike—
Child of the anvil!
Forged by the thunder!

Cleave—
Korlu the smiter!
Lightning-tempered!

Slay—
Korlu the war-ax!
Drinker of life-blood!

Kill—
Korlu the red doom!
Keeper of death-gate!

Price donned the yellow mail. Upon his unaccustomed body it felt cold and stiff and heavy, but it fitted extraordinarily well. He took up the small, oval shield, and fiercely gripped the helve of the ax.

He had never loved Aysa more than during the bitter time of that weird vigil in Iru's tomb, when the cold dank air of the catacombs brushed like clammy wings against them, and minutes stretched into hours, as they awaited the coming of Malikar, sitting side by side.

GREENISH light flickered down the stair, and five men came into the crypts. Four were blue-robed, hooded figures; two armed with long pikes, two carrying torches that flared strangely green.

The other was the golden man Price had seen on the tiger. Gigantic, thick of shoulder, mighty of arm. He wore a red skull-cap, a voluminous robe of crimson. On his shoulder he carried his great, spiked club of yellow metal.

He led his men straight toward the tomb of Iru.

Triumphant evil rode his harshly lined, golden-bearded yellow face. Ugly ela-

tion gleamed in his shallow, tawny eyes. Eyes of unhuman age and wisdom, brooding with dark secrets of the lost past.

Price waited in the tomb, gripping the ancient ax.

The blue-robes, he saw, were afraid. Their steps dragged. Their faces were white and apprehensive. Malikar pushed roughly past them, but even he stopped outside the tomb.

"Come forth, woman!" he shouted harshly.

Aysa made no reply.

The yellow man snatched a torch from one of his cowering men, and pushed boldly into the tomb. Price stepped to meet him in the doorway.

The flat yellow eyes held fear for a moment, incredulous amazement. Then Malikar leered grimly, came on.

"*Kalb ibn kalb!*" he snarled, in the same oddly accented Arabic that Aysa spoke. "Iru can not rest? *I* can put him back to sleep!"

He flung the flambeau to the floor between them, where its green flame still flared, unextinguished. In both hands he lifted the great spiked mace.

Price struck with the yellow ax, a short, chopping swing at the red skull-cap. The golden man stepped quickly back, into the shelter of the doorway. The shimmering ax-blade slipped harmlessly in front of his face, but his own blow was diverted; he could not swing the mace in the narrow doorway.

The golden man charged through the opening again, and Price began chanting the ax-song Aysa had taught him. Once more he saw fear in the shallow, tawny eyes. From one of the blue-robes came a shaken cry of terror.

After an instant's hesitation, Malikar leapt into the tomb.

Moving to the rhythm of his chant, Price gave ground before the threatening mace, whirled the battle-ax aloft, put all his strength into a swing at the red skull-cap. Put too much strength into the blow!

He felt the ominous cracking of the age-dried helve, as the ax came down, knew in an instant of sickening tragedy what had happened.

A fatal snap, and the haft was light in his hands, a useless, brittle stick. The broad-edged head clattered to the floor of the tomb, as Price fell back in dismay, the ax-song dead.

A queer, hurt feeling was in his heart. He had been betrayed. The Durand luck had failed him.

An unpleasant grin of surprized triumph on his yellow face, Malikar sprang forward, lifting his great, spiked club deliberately, to crush the skull of his disarmed foe.

With a sharp little cry of pain and rage, Aysa leapt forward, under the descending mace. The slender dagger flashed in her hands.

Malikar checked the blow, reached out a massive, red-sleeved, golden arm, seized her lifted wrist. The dagger clattered from her helpless fingers, and Malikar flung her, with careless, brutal strength, toward the waiting blue-robes beyond the door.

Price sprang at the yellow man, swinging a blow with his fist. The mace came down over his head. It was a short, one-armed blow. And Price ducked, flung up the oval shield. The mace crashed through his defense, and splintering fire exploded in his head.

PRICE sat up in the cold, musty darkness of the subterranean tomb. The torches were gone. He was very thirsty; in his dry mouth was a bitter, metallic taste. He knew that he had been unconscious for many hours.

He fumbled about. No other living thing was in the tomb. But he struck something large and smooth and imperfectly round, that rolled rattling across the floor.

Fighting down icy panic, he stumbled to the doorway. A smooth, unbroken surface of cold stone opposed him. Wildly, he ran his fingers over the tight-fitting slab. Then he remembered that the massive stone door of the vault had swung inward, and that it had no knob on the inside.

He was sealed in Iru's tomb!

The bewildering adventures and fantastic perils that came to Price Durand as he took up the tiger's trail are fascinatingly told in the June WEIRD TALES. Don't miss it.

Moonlight on a Skull

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Golden goats on a hillside black,
  Silken gown on a wharf-side trull,
Screaming girl on a silver rack—
  What are dreams in a shadowed skull?

I stood at a shrine and Chiron died,
  A woman laughed from the purple roofs,
And he burned and lived and rose in his pride
  And shattered the tiles with clanging hoofs.

I opened a volume dark and rare,
  I lighted a candle of mystic lore—
Bare feet throbbed on the outer stair
  And book and candle sank to the floor.

Ships that reel on the windy sea,
  Lovers that take the world to wife,
What may the Traitress hold for me
  Who scarce have lifted the veil of life?

"He heard the teeth clash and grate on the linked iron."

The Beast of Averoigne

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

It came when the comet flamed red across the sky, a ravening monster that brought death and panic terror to a peaceful countryside

OLD age, like a moth in some fading arras, will gnaw my memories oversoon, as it gnaws the memories of all men. Therefore I, Luc le Chaudronnier, sometime known as astrologer and sorcerer, write this account of the true origin and slaying of the Beast of Averoigne. And when I have ended, the writing shall be sealed in a brazen box, and the box be set in a secret chamber of my house at Ximes, so that no man shall learn the verity of this matter till many years and decades have gone by. Indeed, it were not well for such evil prodigies to be divulged while any who took part in them are still on the earthward side of Purgatory. And at present the truth is known only to me and to certain others who are sworn to maintain secrecy.

As all men know, the advent of the Beast was coeval with the coming of that

red comet which rose behind the Dragon in the early summer of 1369. Like Satan's rutilant hair, trailing on the wind of Gehenna as he hastens worldward, the comet streamed nightly above Averoigne, bringing the fear of bale and pestilence in its train. And soon the rumor of a strange evil, a foulness unheard of in any legend, passed among the people.

To Brother Gerome of the Benedictine Abbey of Perigon it was given to behold this evil ere the horror thereof became manifest to others. Returning late to the monastery from an errand in Ste. Zenobie, Gerome was overtaken by darkness. No moon arose to lantern his way through the forest; but, between the gnarled boughs of antic oaks, he saw the vengefully streaming fire of the comet, which seemed to pursue him as he went. And Gerome felt an eery fear of the pit-deep shadows, and he made haste toward the abbey postern.

Passing among the ancient trees that towered thickly behind Perigon, he thought that he discerned a light from the windows, and was much cheered thereby. But, going on, he saw that the light was near at hand, beneath a lowering bough. It moved as with the flitting of a fen-fire, and was of changeable color, being pale as a corposant, or ruddy as new-spilled blood, or green as the poisonous distillation that surrounds the moon.

Then, with terror ineffable, Gerome beheld the thing to which the light clung like a hellish nimbus, moving as it moved, and revealing dimly the black abomination of head and limbs that were not those of any creature wrought by God. The horror stood erect, rising to more than the height of a tall man; and it swayed like a great serpent, and its members undulated, bending like heated wax. The flat black head was thrust forward on a snakish neck. The eyes, small and lidless, glowing like coals from a wizard's brazier, were set low and near together in a noseless face above the serrate gleaming of such teeth as might belong to a giant bat.

This much, and no more, Gerome saw, ere the thing went past him with its nimbus flaring from venomous green to a wrathful red. Of its actual shape, and the number of its limbs, he could form no just notion. Running and slithering rapidly, it disappeared among the antique oaks, and he saw the hellish light no more.

Nigh dead with fear, Gerome reached the abbey postern and sought admittance. And the porter, hearing the tale of that which he had met in the moonless wood, forbore to chide him for his tardiness.

Before nones, on the morrow, a dead stag was found in the forest behind Perigon. It had been slain in some ungodly fashion, not by wolf or poacher or hunter. It was unmarked by any wound, other than a wide gash that had laid open the spine from neck to tail. The spine itself had been shattered and the white marrow sucked therefrom; but no other portion had been devoured. None could surmise the nature of the beast that slew and ravened in such fashion. But the good Brothers, heedful of the story told by Gerome, believed that some creature from the Pit was abroad in Averoigne. And Gerome marvelled at the mercy of God, which had permitted him to escape the doom of the stag.

Now, night by night, the comet greatened, burning like an evil mist of blood and fire, while the stars blenched before it. And day by day, from peasants, priests, woodcutters and others who came to the abbey, the Benedictines heard tales of fearsome and mysterious depredations. Dead wolves were found with their chines laid open and the white marrow gone; and an ox and a horse were treated in like fashion. Then, it seemed, the un-

known beast grew bolder—or else it wearied of such humble prey as the creatures of farm and forest.

At first, it did not strike at living men, but assailed the dead like some foul eater of carrion. Two freshly buried corpses were found lying in the cemetery at Ste. Zenobie, where the thing had dug them from their graves and had bared their vertebræ. In each case, only a little of the marrow had been eaten; but, as if in rage or disappointment, the cadavers had been torn asunder, and the tatters of their flesh were mixed with the rags of their cerements. From this, it would seem that only the spinal marrow of creatures newly killed was pleasing to the monster.

Thereafterward, the dead were not again molested. But on the night following the desecration of the graves, two charcoal-burners, who plied their trade in the forest not far from Perigon, were slain in their hut. Other charcoal-burners, dwelling near by, heard the shrill screams that fell to sudden silence; and peering fearfully through the chinks of their bolted doors, they saw anon in the starlight the departure of a black, obscenely glowing shape that issued from the hut. Not till dawn did they dare to verify the fate of their fellows, who had been served in the same manner as the stag, the wolves and the corpses.

THEOPHILE, the abbot of Perigon, was much exercised over this evil that had chosen to manifest itself in the neighborhood and whose depredations were all committed within a few hours' journey of the abbey. Pale from overstrict austerities and vigils, he called the monks before him in assembly; and a martial ardor against the minions of Asmodai blazed in his hollowed eyes as he spoke.

"Truly," he said, "there is a great devil among us, that has risen with the comet from Malebolge. We, the Brothers of Perigon, must go forth with cross and holy water to hunt the devil in its hidden lair, which lies haply at our very portals."

So, on the forenoon of that same day, Theophile, together with Gerome and six others chosen for their hardihood, sallied forth and made search of the forest for miles around. They entered with lit torches and lifted crosses the deep caves to which they came, but found no fiercer thing than wolf or badger. Also, they searched the crumbling vaults of the deserted castle of Faussesflammes, which was said to be haunted by vampires. But nowhere could they trace the monster or find any sign of its lairing.

With nightly deeds of terror, beneath the comet's blasting, the middle summer went by. Men, women, children, to the number of more than forty, were done to death by the Beast, which, though seeming to haunt mainly the environs of the abbey, ranged afield at times even to the shores of the river Isoile and the gates of La Frenâie and Ximes. There were those who beheld it by night, a black and slithering foulness clad in changeable luminescence; but no man saw it by day. And always the thing was silent, uttering no sound; and was swifter in its motion than the weaving viper.

Once, it was seen by moonlight in the abbey garden, as it glided toward the forest between rows of peas and turnips. Then, coming in darkness, it struck within the walls. Without waking the others, on whom it must have cast a Lethean spell, it took Brother Gerome, slumbering on his pallet at the end of the row, in the dormitory. And the fell deed was not discovered till daybreak, when the monk who slept nearest to Gerome awakened and saw his body, which lay face downward with the back of the robe and the flesh beneath in bloody tatters.

A week later, it came and dealt likewise with Brother Augustin. And in spite of exorcisms and the sprinkling of holy water at all doors and windows, it was seen afterward, gliding along the monastery halls; and it left an unspeakably blasphemous sign of its presence in the chapel. Many believed that it menaced the abbot himself; for Brother Constantin the cellarer, returning late from a visit to Vyones, saw it by starlight as it climbed the outer wall toward that window of Theophile's cell which faced the great forest. And seeing Constantin, the thing dropped to the ground like a huge ape and vanished among the trees.

Great was the scandal of these happenings, and the consternation of the monks. Sorely, it was said, the matter preyed on the abbot, who kept his cell in unremitting prayer and vigil. Pale and meager as a dying saint he grew, mortifying the flesh till he tottered with weakness; and a feverish illness devoured him visibly.

More and more, apart from this haunting of the monastery, the horror fared afield, even invading walled towns. Toward the middle of August, when the comet was beginning to decline a little, there occurred the grievous death of Sister Therese, the young and beloved niece of Theophile, killed by the hellish Beast in her cell at the Benedictine convent of Ximes. On this occasion the monster was met by late passers in the streets, and others watched it climb the city ramparts, running like some enormous beetle or spider on the sheer stone as it fled from Ximes to regain its hidden lair.

In her dead hands, it was told, the pious Therese held tightly clasped a letter from Theophile in which he had spoken at some length of the dire happenings at the monastery, and had confessed his grief and despair at being unable to cope with the Satanic horror.

All this, in the course of the summer, came to me in my house at Ximes. From the beginning, because of my commerce with occult things and the powers of darkness, the unknown Beast was the subject of my concern. I knew that it was no creature of earth or of the terrene hells; but regarding its actual character and genesis I could learn no more at first than any other. Vainly I consulted the stars and made use of geomancy and necromancy; and the familiars whom I interrogated professed themselves ignorant, saying that the Beast was altogether alien and beyond the ken of sublunar spirits.

Then I bethought me of that strange, oracular ring which I had inherited from my fathers, who were also wizards. The ring had come down from ancient Hyperborea, and had once been the property of the sorcerer Eibon. It was made of a redder gold than any that the Earth had yielded in latter cycles, and was set with a large purple gem, somber and smoldering, whose like is no longer to be found. In the gem an antique demon was held captive, a spirit from pre-human worlds, which would answer the interrogation of sorcerers.

So, from a rarely opened casket, I brought out the ring and made such preparations as were needful for the questioning. And when the purple stone was held inverted above a small brazier filled with hotly burning amber, the demon made answer, speaking in a shrill voice that was like the singing of fire. It told me the origin of the Beast, which had come from the red comet, and belonged to a race of stellar devils that had not visited the Earth since the foundering of Atlantis; and it told me the attributes of the Beast, which, in its own proper form, was invisible and intangible to men, and could manifest itself only in a fashion supremely abominable. Moreover, it in-

formed me of the one method by which the Beast could be vanquished, if overtaken in a tangible shape. Even to me, the student of darkness, these revelations were a source of horror and surprize. And for many reasons, I deemed the mode of exorcism a doubtful and perilous thing. But the demon had sworn that there was no other way.

Musing on that which I had learned, I waited among my books and alembics; for the stars had warned me that my intervention would be required in good time.

To me, following the death of Sister Therese, there came privily the marshal of Ximes, together with the abbot Theophile, in whose worn features and bowed form I descried the ravages of mortal sorrow and horror and humiliation. And the two, albeit with palpable hesitancy, asked my advice and assistance in the laying of the Beast.

"You, Messire le Chaudronnier," said the marshal, "are reputed to know the arcanic arts of sorcery, and the spells which summon and dismiss demons. Therefore, in dealing with this devil, it may be that you shall succeed where all others have failed. Not willingly do we employ you in the matter, since it is not seemly for the church and the law to ally themselves with wizardry. But the need is desperate, lest the demon should take other victims. In return for your aid we can promise you a goodly reward of gold and a guarantee of lifelong immunity from all inquisition which your doings might otherwise invite. The Bishop of Ximes, and the Archbishop of Vyones, are privy to this offer, which must be kept secret."

"I ask no reward," I replied, "if it be in my power to rid Averoigne of this scourge. But you have set me a difficult task, and one that is haply attended by strange perils."

"All assistance that can be given you shall be yours to command," said the marshal. "Men-at-arms shall attend you, if need be."

Then Theophile, speaking in a low, broken voice, assured me that all doors, including those of the abbey of Perigon, would be opened at my request, and that everything possible would be done to further the laying of the fiend.

I reflected briefly, and said:

"Go now, but send to me, an hour before sunset, two men-at-arms, mounted, and with a third steed. And let the men be chosen for their valor and discretion: for this very night I shall visit Perigon, where the horror seems to center."

REMEMBERING the advice of the gem-imprisoned demon, I made no preparation for the journey, except to place upon my index finger the ring of Eibon, and to arm myself with a small hammer, which I placed at my girdle in lieu of a sword. Then I awaited the set hour, when the men and the horses came to my house, as had been stipulated.

The men were stout and tested warriors, clad in chain-mail, and carrying swords and halberds. I mounted the third horse, a black and spirited mare, and we rode forth from Ximes toward Perigon, taking a direct and little-used way which ran through the werewolf-haunted forest.

My companions were taciturn, speaking only in answer to some question, and then briefly. This pleased me; for I knew they would maintain a discreet silence regarding that which might occur before dawn. Swiftly we rode, while the sun sank in a redness as of welling blood among the tall trees; and soon the darkness wove its thickening webs from bough to bough, closing upon us like some inexorable net of evil. Deeper we

went, into the brooding woods; and even I, the master of sorceries, trembled a little at the knowledge of all that was abroad in the darkness.

Undelayed and unmolested, however, we came to the abbey at late moonrise, when all the monks, except the aged porter, had retired to their dormitory. The abbot, returning at sunset from Ximes, had given word to the porter of our coming, and he would have admitted us; but this, as it happened, was no part of my plan. Saying I had reason to believe the Beast would re-enter the abbey that very night, I told the porter my intention of waiting outside the walls to intercept it, and merely asked him to accompany us in a tour of the building's exterior, so that he could point out the various rooms. This he did, and during the tour, he indicated a certain window in the second story as being that of Theophile's cell. The window faced the forest, and I remarked the abbot's rashness in leaving it open. This, the porter told me, was his invariable custom, in spite of the oft-repeated demoniac invasions of the monastery. Behind the window we saw the glimmering of a taper, as if the abbot were keeping late vigil.

We had committed our horses to the porter's care. After he had conducted us around the building and had left us, we returned to the space before Theophile's window and began our long watch.

Pale and hollow as the face of a corpse, the moon rose higher, swimming above the somber oaks, and pouring a spectral silver on the gray stone of the abbey walls. In the west the comet flamed among the lusterless signs, veiling the lifted sting of the Scorpion as it sank.

We waited hour by hour in the shortening shadow of a tall oak, where none could see us from the windows. When the moon had passed over, sloping westward, the shadow began to lengthen toward the wall. All was mortally still, and we saw no movement, apart from the slow shifting of the light and shade. Half-way between midnight and dawn the taper went out in Theophile's cell, as if it had burned to the socket; and thereafter the room remained dark.

Unquestioning, with ready weapons, the men-at-arms companioned me in that vigil. Well they knew the demonian terror which they might face before dawn; but there was no trepidation in their bearing. And knowing much that they could not know, I drew the ring of Eibon from my finger, and made ready for that which the demon had directed me to do.

The men stood nearer than I to the forest, facing it perpetually according to a strict order that I had given. But nothing stirred in the fretted gloom; and the slow night ebbed; and the skies grew paler, as it with morning twilight. Then, an hour before sunrise, when the shadow of the great oak had reached the wall and was climbing toward Theophile's window, there came the thing I had anticipated. Very suddenly it came, and without forewarning of its nearness, a horror of hellish red light, swift as a kindling, wind-blown flame, that leapt from the forest gloom and sprang upon us where we stood stiff and weary from our night-long vigil.

One of the men-at-arms was borne to the ground, and I saw above him, in a floating redness as of ghostly blood, the black and semi-serpentine form of the Beast. A flat and snakish head, without ears or nose, was tearing at the man's armor with sharp, serrate teeth, and I heard the teeth clash and grate on the linked iron. Swiftly I laid the ring of Eibon on a stone I had placed in readiness, and broke the dark jewel with a blow of the hammer that I carried.

From the pieces of the lightly shattered gem, the disemprisoned demon rose

in the form of a smoky fire, small as a candle-flame at first, and greatening like the conflagration of piled fagots. And, hissing softly with the voice of fire, and brightening to a wrathful, terrible gold, the demon leapt forward to do battle with the Beast, even as it had promised me, in return for its freedom after cycles of captivity.

It closed upon the Beast with a vengeful flaring, tall as the flame of an auto-da-fe, and the Beast relinquished the man-at-arms on the ground beneath it, and writhed back like a burnt serpent. The body and members of the Beast were loathfully convulsed, and they seemed to melt in the manner of wax and to change dimly and horribly beneath the flame, undergoing an incredible metamorphosis. Moment by moment, like a werewolf that returns from its beasthood, the thing took on the wavering similitude of man. The unclean blackness flowed and swirled, assuming the weft of cloth amid its changes, and becoming the folds of a dark robe and cowl such as are worn by the Benedictines. Then, from the cowl, a face began to peer, and the face, though shadowy and distorted, was that of the abbot Theophile.

This prodigy I beheld for an instant; and the men also beheld it. But still the fire-shaped demon assailed the abhorrently transfigured thing, and the face melted again into waxy blackness, and a great column of sooty smoke arose, followed by an odor as of burning flesh commingled with some mighty foulness. And out of the volumed smoke, above the hissing of the demon, there came a single cry in the voice of Theophile. But the smoke thickened, hiding both the assailant and that which it assailed; and there was no sound, other than the singing of fed fire.

At last, the sable fumes began to lift, ascending and disappearing amid the boughs, and a dancing golden light, in the shape of a will-o'-the-wisp, went soaring over the dark trees toward the stars. And I knew that the demon of the ring had fulfilled its promise, and had now gone back to those remote and ultramundane deeps from which the sorcerer Eibon had drawn it down in Hyperborea to become the captive of the purple gem.

The stench of burning passed from the air, together with the mighty foulness; and of that which had been the Beast there was no longer any trace. So I knew that the horror born of the red comet had been driven away by the fiery demon. The fallen man-at-arms had risen, unharmed beneath his mail, and he and his fellow stood beside me, saying naught. But I knew that they had seen the changes of the Beast, and had divined something of the truth. So, while the moon grew gray with the nearness of dawn, I made them swear an awful oath of secrecy, and enjoined them to bear witness to the statement I must make before the monks of Perigon.

Then, having settled this matter, so that the good renown of the holy Theophile should suffer no calumny, we aroused the porter. We averred that the Beast had come upon us unaware, and had gained the abbot's cell before we could prevent it, and had come forth again, carrying Theophile with its snakish members as if to bear him away to the sunken comet. I had exorcised the unclean devil, which had vanished in a cloud of sulfurous fire and vapor; and, most unluckily, the abbot had been consumed by the fire. His death, I said, was a true martyrdom, and would not be in vain: the Beast would no longer plague the country or bedevil Perigon, since the exorcism I had used was infallible.

This tale was accepted without question by the Brothers, who grieved mightily for their good abbot. Indeed, the tale was true enough, for Theophile had been innocent, and was wholly ignorant of the foul change that came upon him nightly in his cell, and the deeds that were done by the Beast through his loathfully transfigured body. Each night the thing had come down from the passing comet to assuage its hellish hunger; and being otherwise impalpable and powerless, it had used the abbot for its energumen, molding his flesh in the image of some obscene monster from beyond the stars.

It had slain a peasant girl in Ste. Zenobie on that night while we waited behind the abbey. But thereafter the Beast was seen no more in Averoigne; and its murderous deeds were not repeated.

IN TIME the comet passed to other heavens, fading slowly; and the black terror it had wrought became a varying legend, even as all other bygone things. The abbot Theophile was canonized for his strange martyrdom; and they who read this record in future ages will believe it not, saying that no demon or malign spirit could have prevailed thus upon true holiness. Indeed, it were well that none should believe the story: for thin is the veil betwixt man and the godless deep. The skies are haunted by that which it were madness to know; and strange abominations pass evermore between earth and moon and athwart the galaxies. Unnamable things have come to us in alien horror and will come again. And the evil of the stars is not as the evil of Earth.

The Word of Bentley

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

The story of a haunted stock ticker, and a man whom even death could not prevent from keeping his word

THE morning had been foggy. And now the whole world was one vast fog to John Bentley. The mist was becoming thicker, writhing and twisting, rolling in great banks to overwhelm him. He could just distinguish the faces of the train crew, whose strong hands had extricated him from the wreckage of his car. With a final effort he had waved them aside, so that they desisted from their attempt to move him. John Bentley's iron soul dominated those about him, even as it tottered perilously close to the Border. He knew that his daughter, Janet, kneeling at his side, would not step into the mists with him. For this he was glad, and glad also that an annuity that he had purchased in his day of power would provide for Janet and her mother.

But Bentley had one problem, and little time in which to solve it. He stared grimly into the fog that gathered, ever denser and yet more dense. He sought in his remaining moments to devise some way of keeping his word to Jim Woodford. To march alone into that engulfing grayness was nothing to Bentley, for he

was weary, that morning early in 1930, and had been mortally weary ever since those fatal last days of 1929, when with a few other valorous, foolhardy souls he had sought to stem the rushing destruction that was overwhelming the market.

Some of those who had survived had faith in Bentley, and they had taken his unsecured word and given him a fresh start. But that terrible hammering had burned some of the iron out of his soul, so that the circling mists at the railroad crossing were a cool, quiet refuge undisturbed by the clack-clack of the teletype, and the flickering quotations of the tape.

He was only concerned with his word to Jim Woodford, who was now in the jungles of Yucatan, with his fortune in Bentley's hands.

"I'll watch 'em for you, Jim," he had said, as he grasped Woodford's hand, "till hell's no bigger than a cook-stove!"

And Woodford, knowing that John Bentley's word was his god, went on to the interior of Yucatan, far beyond any cable, or letter, or messenger.

The mists were crowding in closely, and John Bentley's word was becoming more tenuous than the shifting grayness. He knew that he could not keep it. And then, with one foot across the Border, that dying man whose dimmed eyes had seen only the failure of his one remaining purpose, grasped suddenly at a final hope. With an effort, he spoke, and put command into his voice.

"Janet, get my brief-case out of the wreck. Show these men where I kept it."

He could still distinguish those men he had forbidden to move him. He knew now why he had ordered them to desist.

Janet returned with the brief-case, and opened it.

"Pick out an irrevocable power-of-attorney form," he said, "and give me my pen."

The pen was broken, but enough ink clung to its point to enable him to sign his name, and have it witnessed.

"Janet, this gives you absolute authority over every share of stock I hold. I can't keep my promise to Woodford, but you'll do it for me. We can't fall down on Uncle Jim. So don't fail me."

And before his daughter could answer, the mists closed in on the speculator. She saw that he had gone smiling into the grayness, knowing that his word would be kept.

THE weight of that trust bore down more heavily on Janet Bentley than the earth they had dropped into John Bentley's grave.

"Six feet of dirt is enough to keep any man in place," he had once said. "My old man couldn't afford a tomb, and I won't!"

Janet Bentley, with the appalling burden of that irrevocable power of attorney, wondered if any six feet of earth could bear down a man who had for so many years carried the load symbolized by that sheet of paper. She tried to explain it to her mother, who, though thirty years married to a speculator, still thought that preferred stocks were so called because of an unusual demand for them.

"Uncle Jim," she said, "has a strongbox full of securities up in Hartford. And the night he stopped to tell us good-bye, he developed a fidgety streak about leaving them to the mercy of whatever the market might do."

She paused, knowing the futility of explaining a "put" to her mother.

"So Daddy agreed to buy all of his holdings at a price lower than the recent quotations, but high enough so Uncle Jim wouldn't lose if the market broke

badly. That way, he could go to Yucatan and not worry about returning and finding himself wiped out."

"But that was terribly foolish," protested Mrs. Bentley, "offering to buy them all at a certain figure, no matter how low they might drop. And I certainly don't think that you should worry about such a ridiculous promise. We've lost your father, and Jim Woodford will only lose some money."

"That's not the point," explained Janet, patiently. "Daddy wasn't taking any risk. He watched the tape every hour of the day. The moment things looked risky, all he would have to do would be to borrow some shares just like Uncle Jim had in his deposit box, and sell them before they dropped to the agreed price. And when Uncle Jim returned from Yucatan, he'd turn over his shares to the brokers that loaned shares to Daddy, and receive the price of those that were borrowed and sold. It's all very simple, isn't it, Mother?"

Mrs. Bentley admitted that it was quite clear. This paved the way for another objection.

"Why don't you turn that agreement over to Bennett & Keene? They could handle it."

"There is no record," replied Janet. "It was just a gentleman's agreement. And anyway, Uncle Jim may be gone so long that no house in town would sell a 'put' for that length of time. So I'm going to keep his word for him."

Mrs. Bentley sighed wearily. Gentlemen's agreements were such idiotic things.

"Mother, I've got to!" reiterated Janet. "Or he'd come out of his grave and do it himself. That's why his word was good when he was alive. That's why his friends staked him, last fall, so he could get a fresh start. If it came to the worst, I'd sell every share he's got, to protect his word to Uncle Jim."

"Janet, you'll do nothing that silly!" exclaimed Mrs. Bentley. "We'd have nothing left but that little annuity, we can barely live on."

"Try and stop me. I've got an irrevocable power of attorney. I can sell those stocks and buy bird seed if I want to!"

And Mrs. Bentley knew that she was beaten.

JANET consulted Charles Bennett, of Bennett & Keene.

"Miss Bentley," he assured her, "you have no cause for fear. We are rapidly recovering from the disturbance of 1929. Right now, they are betting that Steel will touch 200 within the next few days, and it's at 196 now. And if you sold short to protect Mr. Woodford's interests, you would run the grave risk of not being able to cover if the market advanced sharply. Very hazardous, Miss Bentley, very hazardous."

"Will you sell me a 'put' for Mr. Woodford's holdings, good until his return?" she demanded.

Mr. Bennett promptly declined, saying that Mr. Woodford might never return.

Janet did not know that even as Mr. Bennett spoke, there were underground mutterings in the Street. No one dared mention by name the giant who was rigging the market, so that he could dispose at a substantial profit of the many hundreds of thousands of shares he had bought during November to check the panic. One house did state in a bulletin that the "Old Man Across the Street" was doing a masterly job of making the market boom. That house suddenly collapsed. The others promptly issued optimistic reports, and recommended Steel at 195, and Telephone at 250. They dared

not voice their suspicions about the sudden, unwarranted stock boom early in 1930.

Janet attributed her uneasiness to intuition, to the memory of John Bentley's last words, and the calm smile that had followed his iron-faced, grim peering through the mists.

"He's depending on me. Oh, Lord, if I could just look far enough ahead! They don't know, and those that do, won't tell the truth."

All that Janet could do was watch, and think. Think painfully, despairingly. John Bentley's word must be protected. That intangible gentleman's agreement had become a crushing burden. She went to her father's office, of which she had the keys. It had not yet been subleased. She would sit in its emptiness, and make her decision.

"If I failed he'd turn over in his grave. I can't fail him. But I don't know what it's all about. They got an old veteran like him last fall. What can I do, now? Just sit and wait, and sell everything at the first sign of trouble, if it doesn't come so fast that I won't have time to sell."

Those terrible days of November, 1929, were still fresh in her mind. She knew with what deadly swiftness a market could drop.

As she sat there, Janet became acutely conscious of her father's personality in that office overlooking the street which had been his battlefield. At that battered desk he had fought his way up from nowhere. He had wrested a fortune from the tape that the ticker in the corner spewed forth by the yard. He had lost it, only to regain, and lose once more. And then, as he sought to recoup, Death had called him for more margin. And through all the vicissitudes of his career, he had clung to that dingy office, instead of moving to more ornate quarters during his prosperous days. The grimy plaster and the scarred woodwork had almost become a part of that old gray wolf who held fast to his word, until, as he had often said, "Hell was no bigger than a cook-stove."

Had his car been as far from the railroad crossing as his mind was that fatal morning, he would be at his desk, and in the chair that Janet occupied, keeping his pledge to Woodford, who was far in the jungles of Yucatan, unworried, and secure in the promise of John Bentley, who had never failed a friend.

The gray mists of that morning were surrounding Janet, now, as they had enveloped her father. The weariness of her mind had summoned them as a barrier to shut out the tumult from the outside. She could think better, sitting in his chair, and at his desk. There was a spot worn bare of varnish, where his elbow and forearm had rested; and there, neglected cigars had burned into the wood. That was the telephone into whose transmitter he had issued orders that had shaken the Street, and whipped the idly lagging tape to a frenzied gallop. And at that telephone he had sought to stem the debacle of November just past. If he were now at that desk, he would know how to protect Uncle Jim; he would know whether the Old Man Across the Street was rigging a rotten market to make it display unnatural optimism. He would know the meaning behind those symbols the ticker was printing on the narrow, white tape that was stronger than massive bars of steel, and more devastating than marauding armies. She could only read that so many shares of Steel had changed hands at such and such a price; but he would know why, and what to do next, what order to snap into the transmitter.

A premonition of peril was shaking

Janet as she stared at the ticker. Despite Mr. Bennett's suave optimism, a vague dread was gnawing at her. She was trembling, and knew not why, save that something was urging her to action. She sought to control herself, but in vain. John Bentley's presence now permeated the unaccountable wisps and veils of mist that swirled about the room, twining into columns like small waterspouts, and marching toward the ticker. Uncle Jim was in danger. If John Bentley were at the desk, he would know what to do.

Janet assured herself that the grayish mists were but the protests of nerves and eyes strained by worry. But she was no longer certain that John Bentley was not there.

She picked up the tape, blinked incredulously, regarded it again, then froze in horror. Steel couldn't be that low! She looked for the next quotation. It was lower. And the transactions were heavier. The tape was moving faster, now. That narrow strip of paper had the dreadful vitality of a charged wire. She was as sensitive to its menace as though she had been on the floor of the Exchange. Uncle Jim was ruined beyond redemption, wiped out as she sat there, in her father's chair. No wonder she had felt his presence. She had failed him, but he had not returned soon enough. She could not keep John Bentley's agreement to take Jim Woodford's stock at the agreed figure. It was too late. It was incredible that the market could have broken during the few minutes between Bennett & Keene's and her father's office, but the tape told the story. In despair she watched the prices drop, drop, drop, recover a fraction, and drop again.

Then she lifted the receiver from its hook, and spoke as John Bentley would have spoken: except that he would have been in time.

"Sell every last share. At the market. Immediately!" she directed, as she was connected with Bennett & Keene's office. "I'm not mistaken, and I mean what I say!"

Then she sank back in her father's chair, limp and faint from the ruin that had emerged from the ticker. The mists were thinning, and the grayness was no longer blocking the sunlight that filtered cheerlessly through the window-panes.

She left the office, and called on Bennett & Keene.

MR. BENNETT handed her the memorandum of the orders he had executed. She glanced at the first slip, gasped, looked at the ground glass screen on which the marching figures, greatly enlarged, were projected from the narrow tape.

"Why, what's the matter, Miss Bentley?" asked Mr. Bennett, solicitously, as he supported her by the arm.

She recovered from the dizziness that had for a moment clouded her senses. She looked again, and saw that Steel was at 197. The market had not crashed!

"Nothing, Mr. Bennett, thank you," she replied. "I've just been terribly worried lately." She knew better than to tell him who had urged her to look at that tape in her father's office. She scarcely dared tell herself the truth until after the clerk had written the check, and it had been signed, and countersigned.

Then Janet returned to her father's office, clipped the tangled mass of tape that lay at the foot of the ticker pedestal, and carefully put it into her handbag.

The market broke the following week. Janet called at Bennett & Keene's office regarding a minor detail of the transaction that had liquidated her father's holdings in time to protect his pledge to Woodford.

"Miss Bentley," demanded the broker, "what on earth made you sell that day? At the very top! Who tipped you off?"

She opened her handbag, and gave him a yard of tape, with its printed quotations.

"This," she said. "I read the tape in my father's office. Fortunately, the phone had not yet been disconnected. So I gave you a selling order, right away, before I could change my mind."

Mr. Bennett stared at the tape. Then he stared at her.

"Even now, they're not that low. Not yet," he contrived to say, as he frowned, perplexedly. "Where did you get this tape?"

She repeated her statement.

"Miss Bentley," he resumed, after another long, intent stare, "the ticker in your father's office was cut off the service cable the day after his death. It couldn't have been working, and even in November, stocks weren't as low as it shows them. Haven't been for years! And this is new tape."

"Oh, well, let's not argue about it, Mr. Bennett," she replied, knowing the futility of discussion. "Just call it feminine intuition."

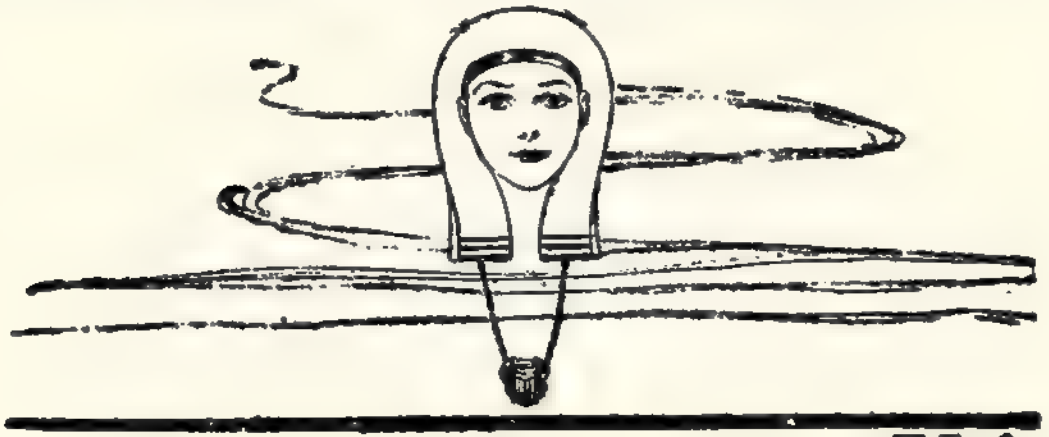
Whereupon Mr. Bennett attended to the business which had brought Janet to his office. Upon its completion, a few minutes later, she entered the customer's room again, where she paused to glance once more at the ground glass screen. Then she took the yard of tape from her handbag.

"Mr. Bennett," she said, "they've been dropping during our absence. Very rapidly. Now they are as low as they are shown on this tape which puzzles you so much. Look!"

He looked at the piece of tape, then glanced up, and saw moving across the ground glass those very figures, in the same sequence that was printed on the ribbon Janet had handed him. He stared blankly, and shook his head as if to deny his eyes. But as he recovered his speech, a frantic customer accosted him, and begged assurance that the bottom had been reached.

"Funny thing," said Janet to herself, as she left the customer's room. "I *did* notice that the ticker was dead when I stepped into Daddy's office. But somehow, I wasn't a bit surprised when it began printing quotations on the tape."

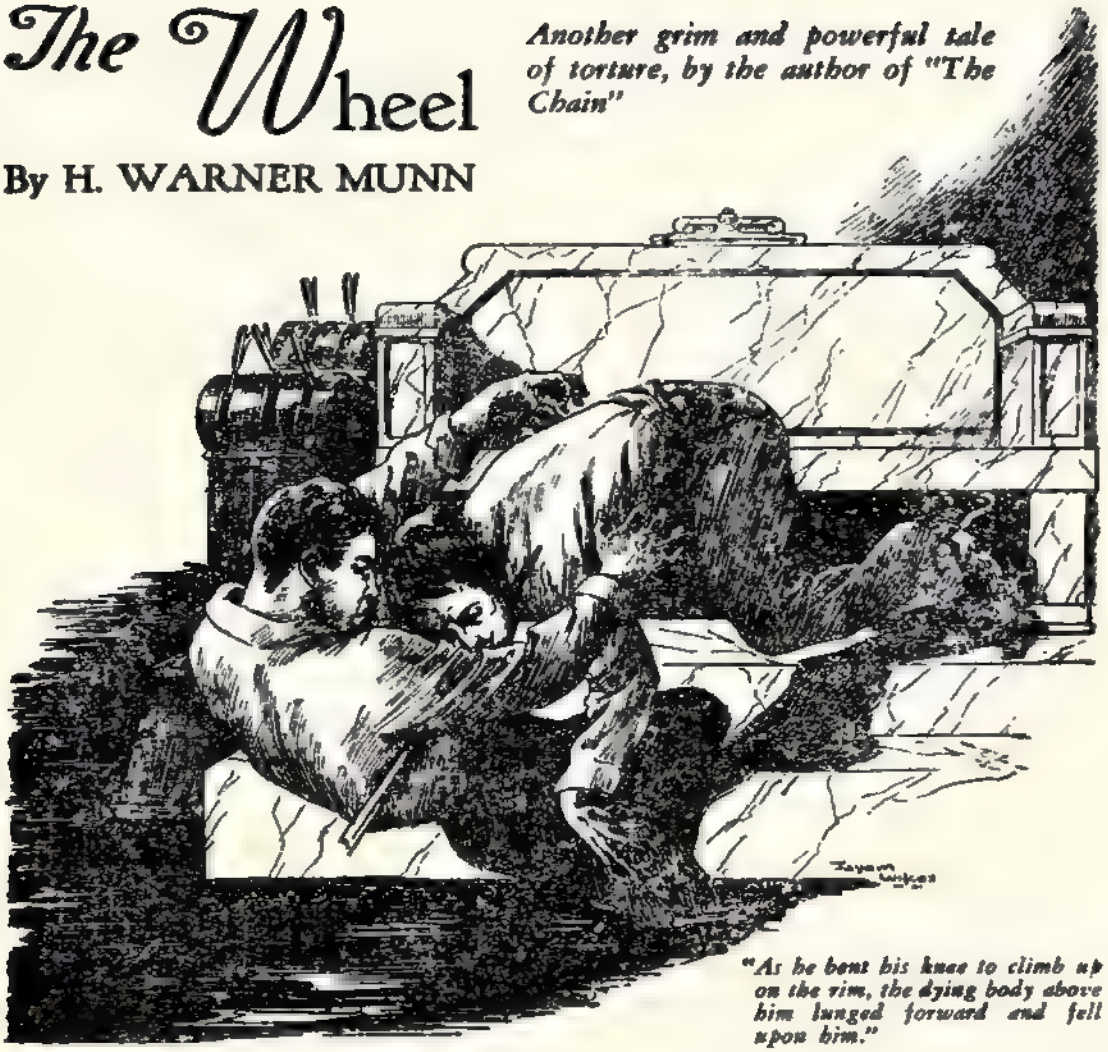
Janet did not pause for further words with Mr. Bennett. She knew that no sane broker could believe that a gray mist had set a dead ticker into motion so that John Bentley could keep his word.



The Wheel

Another grim and powerful tale of torture, by the author of "The Chain"

By H. WARNER MUNN



"As he bent his knee to climb up on the rim, the dying body above him lunged forward and fell upon him."

1. Why the Wheel Was Made

THE tall American looked across the dinner table, with an amused tolerance.

"Come, come, Bohorquia! You don't seriously expect me to believe that cock-and-bull story, do you? The idea of a torture chamber in this day and age is preposterous! Especially one in working order as you claim this one is. Own up, now, aren't you kidding me?"

The other, a dark, slight-boned individual, wet his full vividly red lips with a flicking tongue-tip before replying. If he felt annoyance at the rejection of his previous remark, only a hairline narrowing of his eyelids gave proof of his irritation.

He smiled as he said, "Follow me, Señor Preece, and I will set all your doubts at rest!"

They rose together.

Bohorquia, owner of this secluded hacienda deep in the Sonoran hills, closed and locked both doors leading to the dining-room.

"Not every one knows all my little secrets. But to you they shall be open, for I am sure you will not tell. Attend carefully——"

He stooped and pressed against a white stone, set at the right of the fireplace. This apparently released a catch, but it was necessary to press upon two other stones as well, before a panel slid noiselessly upward, disclosing a dark opening in the wall. Now a motto in red letters was seen above this entrance, and Preece read aloud, "Misericordia et Justitia."

"The ironic motto of the Inquisition," said Bohorquia. "Come!"

Preece, the burly disbeliever, looked dubiously at the odd doorway; but then with a shrug he followed whither his host had already gone, and the panel slid down. Behind them had been left a locked, quiet and innocent-appearing room; before them a narrow and winding passageway led down like a slanting ramp.

There were no stairs, Preece decided, and then he blinked in a flood of light which streamed down from electric bulbs hung from the roof of the tunnel.

"A fairly recent improvement of my lamented father's," explained Bohorquia, as they walked along. "The power is obtained from a dynamo run by a dammed stream near by. We also have plenty left over to run some simple machines, besides utilizing the water to irrigate my fields. I think you will agree that our system is quite efficient."

Preece was hardly listening. He was wondering why, though there must be quite a number of feet of earth and rock between them and daylight, the air was not cold and dank. Indeed, if anything, the atmosphere seemed charged with a pleasantly pungent and aromatic odor which suggested forests to him and something else which he could not quite identify.

He was still speculating upon this when he observed that the walls of the tunnel were quite dry, though obviously natural in formation, for in few spots were there any scars of the chisel. Then, before he had time to speak out his curiosity, they turned a corner and entered a large chamber.

This was wholly natural in extent, but had been improved by the hand of man, who had furnished the cavern in a peculiar manner.

It was roughly oval, about a hundred feet long by forty in width, and across the narrow portion of this underground room ran a thick and ponderous bar, almost like an immense drive-shaft for some titanic machine. As though in support of this idea, the shaft, fifteen feet from the floor, passed through a wooden wheel, forming its axis.

The rim of the wheel was wide and seemed to be ridged, though Preece could not be certain, owing to a blue haze which obscured the sharp outlines of everything in the cavern and made him cough as well.

About six feet from each side of the hub he noticed that a radiating spoke-like arrangement of sticks or rods was fastened, and he was speculating idly as to their purpose, when he became aware that Bohorquia was addressing him.

Damned nonsense, all this idiotic paraphernalia, but if he was going to get control of those valuable oil lands, he had better seem to pay attention to his host's little idiosyncrasies!

"Sit down, Señor Preece," urged Bohorquia, gesturing toward a low stone bench within easy reach of a system of levers possessing vari-colored handles. Near the wall, they could now hear a rumbling like swiftly rushing water, and Preece surmised that the stream which furnished the power was not far away. Yet no moisture seeped through and the walls were bone-dry.

"If you can spare me a few moments

from your business thoughts, Señor Preece, I would like to relate to you a tale which will make clear to you the purpose of this—er—creation in the center of the chamber."

There was an undercurrent in Bohorquia's smooth voice which the American did not like, but he could not tell just why.

"Shoot. I'm listening."

He lit a cigar and made as though to throw the burning match upon the cracked brown expanse of level floor which joined the narrow rim of stone, some three feet wide, which ran all around the chamber, but paused. Odd, he hadn't noticed *that* before. Why, that brown stuff must be pavement of some sort. It was the source of that peculiar odor, like hot tar used in fixing the macadam roads.

Bohorquia bent forward and blew out the flame of the match and began his story in an easy tone of unconcern.

"IT COMMENCED in the city of Seville, when Philip the Second was king of Spain. Francis Bohorquia, whence I obtain my name, dwelt there under a cloud of suspicion. His wife, a gentle and lovely lady, was of Jewish descent and had moved for years beneath the interested regard of the Inquisition.

"Bohorquia was wealthy, and if even a little proof could be secured to convict this pair of Judaism, the Holy Office would profit.

"But they observed their religious duties faithfully, and regularly attended mass, observing the days of fasting, and gave no cause for complaint; so matters went on for years without any action.

"They had one son, Diego, not of age at the time of which I speak, and this son came home one evening to find none there but emissaries of the Inquisition.

"A chastised servant, smarting from justly deserved punishment, had informed the Procurator Fiscal of many things, mostly lies but well sworn to, and retribution was sure and quick.

"Diego never saw his parents again, but he learned from the guard that brought food to the cell in which he awaited his questioning, that their fate had been sudden and that all was over. Everything had been confiscated, and should he be some day freed, he would be without resources.

"Hardly daring to ask the question, the boy inquired what had been done to his parents.

"The guard replied that it had been designed by the Assessor and the Procurator Fiscal, acting under the orders of the Grand Inquisitor, that they should be tortured near to death and later burned to ashes at the next following auto-da-fe.

"In pursuance of these orders, the woman had been scourged until senseless as the first torture. She again denied that either she or Francis were of Jewish belief, so she was then racked.

"Remaining stedfast, her right and left arms were clamped into the garrote and wrenched in the harsh metal.

"When she became conscious for the third time, she was asked to tell the truth. She said nothing and the torturer brought out the *trampazo*.

"Do you know what that is, Señor Preece?"

Preece shook his head, fascinated by Bohorquia's manner. His voice had become more animated and little sparks seemed to snap in his black eyes, as the many brilliant lights were reflected there by his quick nods and jerks of his head.

"I will tell you. It was an iron shoe, hinged so it could be opened. They brought it white-hot and clamped it upon her naked foot and chuckled while that

delicate woman writhed in torment, her flesh slowly being roasted from her bones. God of the Christians! Yahweh of the Jews! Where were *you* when such things were being done?

"She died.

"They brought out Francis Bohorquia. He was hale and strong before they questioned him. He underwent the *Tormento di Toca*—a thin cloth bound over his mouth and nostrils so that he could hardly breathe, *before* they wet it with a steady stream of water which forced the cloth deep into his throat as he fought for breath.

"It was doubly wet when it was pulled out—with water and with blood.

"He was weaker then, but he defied them and would tell nothing that they wished to know, so they gave him the torture of the Chafing-Dish. This was brought in, full of glowing charcoal, and his feet were greased or basted with lard to cause the heat more quickly to penetrate; then they were held close above the coals.

"When his torturers had finished, his walking days were for ever ended. But he was still stout of heart, so they dislocated his arms with the *strappado,* his legs by the rack, and tortured him to the point of rupture with their devilish Water-Cure.

"He remained silent and went defiant to the stake, knowing that if he once confessed it meant the death of his only son, who he had determined must avenge him, and so sent word by the pitying guard.

"That command has been nearly fulfilled!"

Bohorquia fairly spat out the last words, and Preece felt a prickle of unrest and suspicion which set nerves in his stolid body tingling. Was he penned here in this menacing place with a madman? He coughed. That smoke like burning tar *was* becoming very irritant.

"Let's go back upstairs," he urged; "we can talk better there."

"Patience, friend," Bohorquia chuckled, "there's a little more for you to hear, and you'll understand it better in this place.

"Diego, the son, was not tortured—much—but was condemned to life as a galley slave; not, you will note, as one convicted, but as one suspected of Judaism.

"His twenty-first birthday was spent in the cells of the Inquisition. He was thirty and brutalized to the heart's core of him when he made a wild break for liberty as the galley glided up the Tagus just after dusk. He had pulled out the staple that fastened his chains—long had he eyed the rotten board which held it—and he caved in the skull of an overseer with the flailing links, blinded another with a back-hand swing and went overboard, racing a pound of leaden and bronze slugs into the water.

"When he came up, he was far downstream, made his way to Lisbon, found a friend that was waiting for him with clothes and a file, and before morning he was off; a stowaway in a carack bound for Rome, whose captain was no friend to Spain.

"Here is where the story finds its point. He came to California, became a rancher and in ten years was wealthy, after a little skilful work with Indians who had gold, furs or anything which was of value. Somehow Diego always had it before long, and then—always searching for the right place—he came down to Sonora, stumbled upon this natural cavern and made it over to suit his fancy, much as you see it now.

"The natives were his workmen, they built this hacienda over the only entrance to the cave, built the wheel, the dam to furnish power for its turning, dug out the

foundations and filled the pit that remained with pitch.

"Yes, Señor Preece, it is a lake of pitch which you have been so curiously inspecting. It is four feet deep within a circle of twenty feet in all directions around the wheel and seven feet deep everywhere else, *except* in front of one of these two stone benches you see.

"There is a stone block four feet square and six feet high, sunken in the pitch, but I shall not tell you if it is in front of the bench upon which we sit or before the one directly across from this, within jumping distance from that drive-shaft, assuming that a strong man could run out upon that turning slippery rod far enough to be able to jump at all. *Why* should he jump? Patience!

"NINETEEN years is a long time in which to think and plan of vengeance. Diego took three years more to get this retreat built to his liking and then he sailed again for Spain. No one knew this middle-aged man traveling under an assumed name, and bearded and bronzed he was safe from recognition.

"He wanted to find five men:

"The informer against his parents.

"The torturer.

"The Procurator Fiscal.

"The Assessor.

"The Grand Inquisitor.

"The Grand Inquisitor he caused to be assassinated by a hired bravo. The Procurator Fiscal and the Assessor, he learned, were somewhere in the Americas, but the torturer and the informer he took into his employ at a wage which meant riches to them and brought them home. And home was here!

"One night the informer went to sleep, drugged, and awoke bound lightly so that he could readily untie himself. but he was upon the wheel. With his first motion, the wheel began to move.

"Swiftly as he might climb, the wheel kept even pace with his efforts, while down below the melted bubbling pitch waited, hungry for him, heated hotter and hotter by five roaring furnaces deep under this cavern with iron plates set in this floor above them! There was no rest for him, for the wheel never stopped; the waterfall saw to that, although the speed might be regulated at this spectator's bench, where Diego sat and gloated over the pleadings of the man who had watched with a grin on his lips when others suffered. He pointed out to the informer that it would not be wise to stop climbing; for if he once touched the pitch and was still able to bear the pain, the sticky liquid would weight down his clothes until he could not climb and eventually would be driven frantic by repeated immersions and would fall the sooner into his inevitable resting-place. You will notice that the under edge of the wheel is only a few inches above the surface of the pitch, which naturally rises as it is heated."

"By heaven! Bohorquia, I'll not stay here another minute, I'm stifling in this heat!" Preece mopped his face with a big red bandanna and scowled. "You and your great-great-grandfather—bosh! This is all nonsense. If that guy had had the guts of a rabbit, he would have jumped off into that pitch and ended it all quick. Any *man* would! Let's go upstairs."

Bohorquia's eyes glittered oddly. "Do you really think so, my friend? The informer did not jump! He rode that wheel for a full day and a half, before he became unconscious for lack of rest and could no longer hold on.

"The torturer was of different mettle. He was only upon the wheel for a couple of hours, when he ran out upon the re-

volving shaft and almost reached the stonework before he fell into the pitch. He came up once, so I have been told, blubbering and moaning as the heat struck in, and he died there only a foot from the edge of the stones, unable to move an arm in the clinging sticky stuff. You see, he guessed at the position of the hidden rock a foot beneath the surface, but he did not guess rightly. The situation must have been quite edifying to Diego, who remembered very well what the guard had told him of the atrocities which this man had inflicted upon his parents; don't you think so, Señor Preece?"

A sullen stare was the only reply.

"To prevent the danger of a man escaping entirely, Diego fixed that arrangement of keen-edged swords you see about six feet along upon the shaft. No one has been able to leap over that and keep his footing upon the other side—yet! Diego never found the Procurator Fiscal or the Assessor, and fearing that his vengeance would be incomplete, he bred a large family of sons and swore them to the relentless pursuit of those two villains. He regarded them as utter filth and considered that the world would be tainted until their last descendant was dead. So were all of Diego's sons trained to believe, and they carried out their training in action, fulfilling their oath to the letter.

"Men, women and children have ridden that wheel, Señor Preece, and their mummies or their bones pave the bottom of this pool!"

"How long since it has last been used?" said Preece thickly, getting up from his seat.

"I should say about thirty years. My father thought he had accounted for the very last descendant, but we afterward learned that there was a son, Señor *Perez!*"

"You devil!" the American howled, and sprang at the smaller man, but Bohorquia had been expecting the move. There was a flash of metal and as the big man's nerves tensed for the shock of the bullet into his flesh, a spray of sweet, pleasantly perfumed liquid wet his face.

He gasped, fell forward and lay without a movement. His dulling ears heard Bohorquia say faintly, from an immeasurable distance:

"And you are the man who meant to cheat me out of my oil lands! I wonder if you are a man or just a rabbit."

2. *The Wheel Turns*

A HOLLOW inhuman voice boomed out one mighty and terrifying cry, and the single word it uttered was tossed about by the echoes of the cavern.

"Justice!"

Preece opened his eyes. The glaring lights shone down upon him as before, but his position had changed.

He lay flat upon his back, staring up at the stalactite-studded cavern roof. About his chest and legs were ropes, but they were not tight and his hands were free to unfasten the knots which had, conveniently for him, been tied in front, within easy reach. He thought with contempt of whoever had bound him so carelessly and began to pick at the knots.

He noticed that his back ached, but did not realize at first that he lay upon a gently curving couch, until a change in the light upon the ropes which he worked upon caused him to look up.

The cavern roof was moving! No! By all that was holy, it was he that moved!

Slowly, relentlessly as the finger of Fate, he was descending, feet first, toward the floor of the cavern. Now, as he strained his neck, working frantically at his bonds while he peered between his

feet, the distant cavern wall became visible through a thick blue haze.

And following down it toward the source of that haze, he saw that the floor of the cavern was no longer brown, but black and violent with motion. Great bubbles, a foot or more across, rose, burst with a plop and spatter of inky particles like the sudden commotion of cooking porridge, while into this hell-broth he was descending.

His efforts became frantic, but one recalcitrant knot proved more than his clumsy fingers could master.

Now, directly beneath his feet, he saw the boiling pitch circling in slow and greedy eddies, while supported only by the ropes he hung perpendicularly above the gurgitating mess. He recalled that the under rim of the wheel was not more than a few inches above the surface of the semi-fluid and the memory gave him strength. If he did not win free, he would be dragged under and die horribly in the clinging streamers of a robe as painful as Dejanira's shirt and even more adhesive.

It seemed then that he had the strength of a titan. Reaching a hand behind him, he felt something like the rung of a ladder and took a firm grip of it. Turning in the circle of his bonds, he faced the rim of the wheel and saw now that it was indeed fitted with rungs, not situated flush against the two-foot-wide rim, but fixed about two inches away to afford an easy grip.

His seeking feet settled firm against a lower rung, and as he arched his back like an angry cat, the last rope snapped, not a second too soon. Already he was on the lowest arc of the circle permissible to him, unless he was actually to be dipped into the resinous pool, while upon the instant when the strained fibers parted, the speed of the turning wheel increased, as though malevolently directed; so that he found it a bitter struggle to climb up against the direction of the wheel's rotation. As he strove to maintain his place upon the circumference of this mighty engine of torture, he felt that he was in much the same position as the running squirrel within his wire cage, who, bound as he may and run with all his might, finds himself in the selfsame spot at the end of his struggles for freedom as when his mad chase commenced.

But there was a terrible difference; the squirrel might rest and try again, though his first situation could not be bettered, but sweating Preece, half suffocating in the pungent smoke, knew that the rest he so ardently desired, though taken but for a single second where he now was climbing, would end in slow and agonizing torment and in death.

His only hope was to continue climbing upward, ever upward, until he rounded the overhanging bulge of the wheel and could perhaps reach the top, where, if he were fortunate, he might get to his feet and walk till he dropped or until Bohorquia experienced a change of heart and relented.

The whole experience that he was undergoing was mad! It was impossible, yet he knew if he hesitated the seething pitch below would speedily convince him of its reality. From where he hung, Bohorquia, if he was present, was hidden from him; but hoping desperately for some action of mercy, if nothing more at present than a slight diminution of the wheel's spinning, he cried out in a strangled voice, interjected with coughs as the acrid smoke struck deep into the membranes of his lungs. He begged for mercy, threatened, made wild promises of wealth, and pleaded again; but finding that neither cajolings nor menacing words brought out an answer, he fell

despondently, silent as he continued to climb at his greatest speed, finally concluding that Bohorquia had left him to his fate.

Just then came his answer, the only one he was ever to receive and one that issued from no familiar throat.

Calm, impassive, unhuman, setting the echoes flying in the grim cavern, came again that awful hollow voice that had ushered him back into consciousness, crying in a voice of brass the one word, *"Justice!"*

SCRABBLING with ferocity at the rungs which slipped so swiftly past, he passed the overhang and gained his way little by little toward the top, where he might find relief. Now that the weight of his body did not hang so heavily upon his arms, but was supported in a measure by the rim beneath him, progress was easier and although the speed slightly increased, it was not enough to hold him back, and with exultation in his heart and a surge of returning confidence in his own powers, after some ten minutes of strenuous climbing he was able to stand erect.

Self-satisfaction thrilled him and he looked around with something of the old arrogance. The first peril had been met, overcome and was behind him. Surely he could cope with anything that was to follow!

Twenty feet away, looking along the drive-shaft between the flashing sword blades, he saw Bohorquia watching him without the slightest expression, either of malice or pity. Like an impersonal judge he sat, watching the carrying out of a sentence fixed long ago over which he had no control or interest.

Preece strode upon his treadmill way, revolving plans within his mind and discarding one after the other. If he leapt to the best of his ability, he could not reach the stone rim. If he fell short he would land in pitch four feet deep and would slowly roast, though had this depth been uniform to the pool's rocky shore, it would have been worth the trial, for a strong man might conceivably stand the torture long enough to fight his way to safety. Ah! The thought was vain, for the scheme had been well planned. Ten feet from the wheel, the bubbling pitch was seven feet deep, impassable to the strongest and most iron-nerved man, and not unwillingly Preece gave up the thought. The venture would have been too desperate.

If again, the sword blades were not there, or even so, were not so closely set, a nimble man such as Preece knew himself to be might run out at least half the distance before he was obliged to leap or fall.

Pause now; consider, *which* way should he leap *if* the opportunity should come?

Bohorquia had said that a stone block, six feet high and four feet at the sides, was situated directly in front of one of the two chairs identically alike at either end of the drive-shaft. That would mean that one foot below the boiling pitch, a foothold the size of a small table was ready for him. He would sink to his knees, at best, but if he touched it at all he would be safe; then let Bohorquia look to himself!

Come! There was hope! His clever brain might scheme himself free with such a chance. Now to the main problem; before *which* stone chair lay the block?

He strode his narrow endless path, frowning, studying deep into the intricacies of that long-dead mind which had conceived the plan that might yet bring him to death. What would he have done?

Then suddenly he had the clue fast and he swore with jubilant feeling. Of course!

There was only one set of levers to direct the movements of the wheel! The man in charge must perforce remain in that seat to manage the machinery. Now Preece thought swiftly and with method. The torturer would *not* place the block in front of his own seat, because he would assume that the man upon the wheel would be frantic to reach him, and would wish to see him sinking helplessly to doom; ergo, the block would be upon the opposite side of the pool in front of the other seat and the victim should leap the other way for safety.

His eyes narrowed; *that* reasoning was rudimentary, the simplest brain would arrive at that conclusion and act upon it, therefore the first Bohorquia must have expected his victims to reason that far and fail, so he *would,* after all, have placed the block before the torturer's seat.

The idea did not come to Preece, that there might be no block anywhere in the pool. He went on revolving his thought and looking at it from different angles; it was logical: could he support it further? Yes! The torturer would place the block there so that he would be able to push the victim back into the pitch! That too was only to be expected.

Preece did not doubt that eventually a chance would come for a leap, and he determined to be ready and watchful of opportunity.

He began to breathe easier as he walked along; if he could keep his balance and not lose his head, this gait would be safe for a long time. He estimated it to be about two miles an hour, and knowing himself for a doughty hiker, he cried out with sarcasm:

"Keep it up, old boy, this is just nice exercise for me. If I only had some cigarettes this would be fun!"

The unyielding figure in the directing seat said nothing, but a sardonic chuckle was lost among the pop and snap of the bursting black domes in the pool. Mephistopheles might smile in just such a manner as did Bohorquia then. He reached for a lever with a red handle and Preece felt his heart pound with dreadful expectation of the unknown. He threw it over with a clang that rang dismally in the cavern.

At that second, Preece felt himself flying through the air, the black bubbles leaped up to meet him and he closed his eyes and shrieked as with arms wide flung, he dived headlong toward the gyrating eddies below!

A sharp shock and a shooting pain in his left ankle brought his eyes open again. He was hanging head down in the smoke, and even as he twisted and caught a rung, his foot came loose from his hold and the strain came sharply upon his arms. He saw then what had saved him for the moment.

The shoes he wore were heavy and thick-soled, with large bulging toe-caps that were very stiff. This had caught beneath one of the rungs and held him long enough to save his life, when he pitched helplessly forward, but he had not the time to give thanks just then, for once more the wheel was turning, this time in the opposite direction. The next few moments were crowded ones, but eventually he found himself upon the top and walking easily again, though this time with a dull ache in his ankle and foot. He was not now so certain that he would have a chance to leap for the rim.

EIGHT hours later, he was still walking with a measured stride, lifting his feet mechanically over the rungs. The ache was like a jagged wire bound hot around his ankle; otherwise there was no change. Bohorquia still sat motionless as a carven man, betraying no signs of life

except for the feverish glitter in his restlessly roving eyes, and the occasional movement when a lever was moved.

Preece had learned several things in the last few hours. He had learned that besides the red handle which stopped the wheel, which now he gave his closest attention and had been saved thereby from several other very narrow escapes, a handle that was blue speeded up the wheel and a lever painted yellow slowed it down again. There was a white one that reversed the action and a black one that so far had not been touched, and this was worrying him a great deal as he speculated concerning its purpose.

He had learned also that the voice sternly crying out *"Justice!"* came from a large trumpet high on the wall and was evidently some phonograph attachment which would continue to sound while the shaft turned. Every quarter of an hour the ominous word pealed out, until Preece had now come to realize that this was by far the worst part of his torment. As the time grew near for the trumpet to speak its two syllables, every nerve seemed to grow tense and tingle with horror as though his whole body was expecting a blow. After the echoes had let the word drop, he felt happy; but this sensation was short-lived and soon he was again straining his ears, almost dreading to miss the sound, yet fearing with all his soul that it would come too soon.

He had been hungry and thirsty, but those sensations had passed long ago. Dizziness had come upon him many times, while everything reeled in wild circles, but the pain in his ankle had driven it away. Sleep had found him once and he woke with a start, still methodically walking, lifting his feet over the rungs, and perilously near the edge of the wheel.

When his eyelids had snapped open, he had caught Bohorquia with his hand upon the lever with the black handle, which he had released at once.

This startled Preece immensely and he cried out violently, "This is cold-blooded murder! Is there no particle of humanity in you?"

Bohorquia's teeth showed in a thin-lipped smile of negation. "Not murder. No! This is the final act in a long plan of extermination. Is it murder to kill a rat? Your breed is even more unfit to live!"

He would not answer again to any of Preece's objurgations, and presently he increased the speed to its usual rate of two miles an hour.

Preece had not forgotten, and now after some deduction he believed he knew what the black-handled lever was for. In pursuance of a well-balanced plan, he closed his eyes nearly shut. He could still see through his eyelashes, but he knew that to the man in the chair it would seem as though he slept again.

Surreptitiously watching, he saw Bohorquia's hand slip out and grip the black handle.

The lever snicked silently into place and for a moment Preece detected no difference in his steady stride. Then it came to him that an accustomed sound was missing. The shaft no longer turned, the keen sword blades emitted no sparkling flashes as they swung through their circle, and though the wheel still rotated, the growl of meshing cogs had stopped.

By some lever system running under the pitch and up to the hub of the wheel, Bohorquia had disconnected the power and the wheel was spinning free! Here was a sudden and most alarming danger; unless he could decrease his pace at once, the wheel would turn faster and faster, driving him to increased efforts to hold his place, while his very struggles would add to the rate of turning, until it would

spin too fast for him and inevitably hurl him into the smoking currents of resinous lava below.

He could not suppress a chuckle, for this was what he had suspected. Bohorquia, thinking that he dozed, had flung the wheel out of gear, expecting that he would continue to walk unconsciously, until he had passed the exact center of the wheel's upper rim. Then upon waking, Preece would have found himself upon one of the two downward slopes; his frantic effort to get back would have turned the wheel faster and faster and he would have remained in the same place until he was flung off.

But he had miscalculated! Preece was not asleep! And now, Preece put his plan into effect. Quick as a flash, he dropped over the side of the wheel, wrapped his arms and legs around a spoke fifteen feet long and a second later found himself straddling the drive-shaft as he released the spoke.

Bohorquia was upon his feet now, shouting crazily, and Preece's smile was grim, for he saw that his tormenter touched first the blue handle and then the yellow but dared fling neither into place.

Preece knew well the thoughts that raced through the other man's mind. If he shifted gears now, the racing wheel would strip the cogs clean of the shaft and that might be followed by a broken shaft, a burst wheel, either of which results might well entangle Bohorquia in the deadly tangle of wreckage, though it would infallibly dispose of his victim.

So Preece, confident of a little while to steady himself, took his time in standing erect upon the shaft.

Bohorquia had called the shaft slippery, but it was not. Rust had gnawed it through the years, and as Preece had burst his shoe-laces with his strong thumbs and removed his shoes, he now trod its surface with ease.

He reached the rimless wheel of swords and steadied himself by one while he stepped between them. At that instant he saw Bohorquia's hand touch the yellow handle, and without conscious volition pulled upon the blade. Where it joined the shaft, the sword was red and pitted and at that point it now snapped. Preece's feet slipped from under him, but he caught the shaft as he fell across it, and while he hung precariously there, he poised the sharp-pointed blade like a javelin and darted it at Bohorquia little more than twenty feet away.

It sped true and with great force, catching him in the throat. He staggered and fell across the stone chair, clawing at the blade that pierced him through.

Preece with a thumping heart again managed to sit upon the shaft, and straddling it, he drew himself forward by jerks toward the point where the shaft came through the wall and where he would be able to drop upon the stone rim beside the governing levers.

He was still ten feet away, when Bohorquia, though dying, threw himself against the blue lever. The grinding gears crashed as the shaft commenced to turn and the cogs meshed with the still rapidly spinning wheel; but Preece, feeling the shiver run through the shaft when the mechanism connected it with the power outside, brought his feet up, found a support for them and sprang.

He fell short and yelled with agony, when his shoeless feet struck the seething pitch, but they did not penetrate far and he found himself directly in front of the stone chair.

He had landed upon the stone block! He was safe! He yelled in triumph, and then as he bent his knee to climb upon the rim, the dying body above lunged for-

ward and fell upon him. In an embrace never to be broken they tottered on the brink of the hidden stone block. Preece fought for a foothold and found nothing. Together they slowly sank into the depths of the boiling pitch.

The last scene which came to their bursting eyes, before the implacable tide of agony lapped about their throats, was the sight of the huge wheel, ponderously revolving, recking naught of human passions or of an ancient oath's fulfilment.

Creaking as it slowly spun, the wheel went upon its lonely round, as unaffected by the double tragedy as that stern Fate of which it was the symbol, turning now with the same placid sureness that would mark its progress onward through the slow years, until its strong fabric should rot away or the stream run dry.

The distorted faces went under. One huge bloody bubble rose and burst, just as the metal throat of the phonograph boomed forth once more its only word, in a tone like a funeral bell tolling them into infinity:

"Justice!"

The Money-Lender

By ALFRED I. TOOKE

He tucked his soul in a pigeonhole
  When he went to work each day,
That it might not soil from his daily toil,
  Or his kindlier feelings sway.

His smile was cold as the hoarded gold
  He loaned for a victim's need;
And he grasped his fee with a ghoulish glee,
  For gain was his only creed.

But there came a day when his face turned gray,
  And he madly gasped for breath,
And he sought his soul in the pigeonhole
  As he vainly fought with Death.

And they found him there, in his office chair,
  But his clutching hands were numb;
And he'd left his soul in the pigeonhole,
  When Death, unannounced, had come.

Nomadic Skull

By NARD JONES

A graveyard tale, about the skull of a murdered man that did not lie quiet in his grave

IVOR BOTTEN looked down at the kitchen floor, at Jim Mullen stretched out quiet and awkward and beyond life. Then he looked at the hard, wet stick of cordwood in his hand. Without trembling he shifted the bludgeon from his right hand to his left, lifted a lid of the stove and fed the wood into the embers.

It was done now. In the thought there was nothing more than a sighing relief. It was finished, and he would never be troubled again by that peculiar, insistent knocking which meant that Jim Mullen was outside the door. Botten told himself that he might have done it long ago, that it was too bad he had waited as long as he had.

When the night grew a little deeper and there would be less likelihood of cars along the cemetery road he would rid himself of what was left of Mullen. He would put him in the cemetery, where the dead should be put—and where there was hardly any danger the body would be found. Botten grinned a little to himself. There was something about the idea which appealed to his hard, grim sense of humor.

Beyond the north fence line of Ivor Botten's land lay the old cemetery. It was older than Creston, because it had been started when there was no town, when there was only a gathering of covered wagons and men and women recovering from a Blackfeet attack. Except for the part owned by the local Order of Masons it was a weedy, unattended place. Many of the old wooden markers had decayed and fallen flat against the earth. Others were hidden by rye grass and mustard and tumbleweed.

All this Ivor Botten knew. His plowing, his harrowing, his seeding, and his harvesting—all took him by the north fence a score of times in every season of the year. Putting Mullen's body with the other dead, Ivor knew just how the shallow grave would look next month, the month after, and the month beyond. He knew that by spring, when visits to the cemetery would be made by lovers, Jim Mullen's grave would look like all the rest. Over it would be full-statured rye grass, mustard and tumbleweed.

It happened, too. The ground changed this year as last, as it would in the year to come. No one knew it better than Ivor Botten. And there was even a new zest in working his land, in going past the north fence season after season. Sometimes he was riding the plow, other times he stood braced on the harrow; whatever it was. he thought of how Jim Mullen was over there in the tough weeds.

The sight of those weeds helped Botten. They grew to be more important, because there were nights when he thought he heard Mullen pounding at the door again, bringing something out of the past to torture him. It happened on nights that were full of wind, so that by

morning Ivor Botten had been forced to laugh at himself. But more than once it was so clear that he had thrown the door open, fearfully, and stepped back before an empty darkness that was somehow more horrible than would have been the sight of Jim Mullen himself.

Ivor Botten had always been a little odd, they said in Creston. He had always been a quiet man, keeping to himself, saying hardly anything from that day, right after the Armistice, when he had come to the town and bought the hundred and sixty acre tract near the cemetery above town. But he was a good farmer, thrifty and hard and honest, and they forgave him the secrets they were sure he had.

Now he was queerer than ever. The storekeeper noticed it, and the man at the warehouse who took Ivor's wheat. They were the two who had the most to do with him, who knew him if anybody knew him at all. And because every one in town heard what the warehouse man and the storekeeper thought, Botten came to be the object of curious glances when he walked down the street. Under them he grew furtive and surly, and came into Creston fewer times a year than before.

Two crops of wheat were harvested. Two crops of weeds had grown up swiftly and been pinched out by winter in the cemetery, and a third growth was warming down under the surface. Ivor Botten was eager to get at his spring plowing, to be riding along the fence line again, assuring himself that Mullen was there, that he couldn't be riding the wind to the front door of the little house in the hollow.

But somehow, this time, the old assurance did not come. Somehow the memories of noises at night seemed more acute, more real than the mares in front of him, the soft-turning loam beneath him. Perhaps too eager, he had gone to plowing a little earlier than usual. The sky was leaden and cloudless, and a cold swift wind whipped against his leather jacket. The mares seemed to be nervous and weak in the harness. Their ears stood straight and cupped forward, making Botten angry because he could not understand what it was they saw or smelled.

When he began flanking the north fence line he saw the weeds of the old cemetery leaning still in the wind. They held close against the ground, so that the old markers were not hidden now. For a moment he could not distinguish the spot under which he had put Jim Mullen.

He was suddenly frightened, and he turned his face down toward the furrow that fell easily away from the plowshares. He tried to draw reality, security, from the sight of the black loam falling back. As he watched, something white and round showed against the thick dark leaves of soil. There was a faint sound as the thing lobbed against the share. Then it rolled back into the furrow and lay still.

Botten had tensed, passed that tension down the harness lines and into the bits of the mares. He was unaware that they had stopped, was oblivious to everything but that thing on the ground with spots of wet soil clinging to it where the hollows came.

He knew it was Jim Mullen's skull. There was that little jagged hole, and that piece of jagged metal, eaten thin now, which had covered it and been the delight of the surgeon who had made Mullen live after the war. Yes, it was Mullen's. But it wasn't beneath those weeds which leaned in the wind. It had been beneath Ivor Botten's own soil, had popped up to stare at him, with clots of black mud for eyes.

Ivor Botten ran. He ran across the wet field, the mud clinging heavier with every step of his boots. When he reached the house in the hollow his feet were so heavy that he could hardly drag them. In dreams as a boy he had needed to run and could not. It was like that now. The muscles of his legs tugged and strained, and his blood pounded against his temples; yet he could scarcely reach the porch.

He fell against the door, slipped down onto the floor when the worn catch released itself. In another moment he was in the kitchen, staring at the floor as he had that other time. Suddenly the wind struck against the flimsy front door, banged it shut. Ivor Botten started. His hand fumbled behind the dishes of the kitchen shelf, and with his eyes fearfully on the doorway that led into the room beyond he shot himself through the side of his head. . . .

Two hundred miles from Creston, in a big medical school, three second-year students sat "gabfesting." They knew more now than they would later on as successful physicians. They were harder now than they would be, surer about things beyond life.

One of them looked through the smoke at a smooth white skull perched on a battered table.

"I see you fellows got your skull. Did you get it the way you said you would?"

The other two grinned, a little sheepishly. "Nope," one said. "We bought it."

"I thought you'd get cold feet."

"Oh . . . we tried it. I wouldn't do it again, but we did try it. Dick and I were passing a little burg last summer, and it had a cemetery that hadn't been disturbed since they buried the first settler. We decided here was the place to save a little money. We camped until dark, and then we got something up. . . ."

The second-year medical student shuddered involuntarily. "We got the darned thing—but the fellow'd been bashed in the head. Wasn't a perfect one—and there we were. We could have just thrown it out of the car, but that didn't seem right."

His vacation companion laughed uneasily. "We didn't want to take it back in that cemetery, either."

Their listeners' eyes were wide with awe. "What did you do?"

"Well, finally Dick hiked over the fence and buried it in a field next to the cemetery."

The three were silent a moment, gazing at the "drug-store" skull on the table. Suddenly the youngest of the erstwhile vacationists said, "For the love of Pete, let's forget it—and just because Dick and I have told you about it you needn't be telling any one else. We didn't take the darned thing, anyhow."

The Pot of Tulips

By FITZ-JAMES O'BRIEN

TWENTY-EIGHT years ago I went to spend the summer at an old Dutch villa which then lifted its head from the wild country that, in present days, has been tamed down into a site for a Crystal Palace. Madison Square was then a wilderness of fields and scrub oak, here and there diversified with tall and stately elms. Worthy citizens who could afford two establishments rusticated in the groves that then flourished where ranks of brownstone porticos now form the landscape; and the locality of Fortieth Street, where my summer palace stood, was justly looked upon as at an enterprising distance from the city.

I had an imperious desire to live in this house ever since I can remember. I had often seen it when a boy, and its cool verandas and quaint garden seemed, whenever I passed, to attract me irresistibly. In after years, when I grew up to man's estate, I was not sorry, therefore, when one summer, fatigued with the labors of my business, I beheld a notice in the papers intimating that it was to be let furnished. I hastened to my dear friend, Jasper Joye, painted the delights of this rural retreat in the most glowing colors, easily obtained his assent to share the enjoyments and the expense with me, and a month afterward we were taking our ease in this new paradise.

Independent of early associations, other interests attached me to this house. It was somewhat historical, and had given shelter to George Washington on the occasion of one of his visits to the city. Furthermore, I knew the descendants of the family to whom it had originally belonged. Their history was strange and mournful, and it seemed to me as if their individuality was somehow shared by the edifice. It had been built by a Mr. Van Koeren, a gentleman of Holland, the younger son of a rich mercantile firm at The Hague, who had emigrated to this country in order to establish a branch of his father's business in New York, which even then gave indications of the prosperity it has since reached with such marvelous rapidity. He had brought with him a fair young Belgian wife; a loving girl, if I may believe her portrait, with soft brown eyes, chestnut hair, and a deep, placid contentment spreading over her fresh and in-

nocent features. Her son, Alain Van Koeren, had her picture—an old miniature in a red gold frame—as well as that of his father; and in truth, when looking on the two, one could not conceive a greater contrast than must have existed between husband and wife. Mr. Van Koeren must have been a man of terrible will and gloomy temperament. His face —in the picture—is dark and austere, his eyes deep-sunken, and burning as if with a slow, inward fire. The lips are thin and compressed, with much determination of purpose; and his chin, boldly salient, is brimful of power and resolution. When first I saw those two pictures I sighed inwardly and thought, "Poor child! you must often have sighed for the sunny meadows of Brussels, in the long, gloomy nights spent in the company of that terrible man!"

I was not far wrong, as I afterward discovered. Mr. and Mrs. Van Koeren were very unhappy. Jealousy was his monomania, and he had scarcely been married before his girl-wife began to feel the oppression of a gloomy and ceaseless tyranny. Every man under fifty, whose hair was not white and whose form was erect, was an object of suspicion to this Dutch Bluebeard. Not that he was vulgarly jealous. He did not frown at his wife before strangers, or attack her with reproaches in the midst of her festivities. He was too well-bred a man to bare his private woes to the world. But at night, when the guests had departed and the dull light of the quaint old Flemish lamps but half illuminated the nuptial chamber, then it was that with monotonous invective Mr. Van Koeren crushed his wife. And Marie, weeping and silent, would sit on the edge of the bed listening to the cold, trenchant irony of her husband, who, pacing up and down the room, would now and then stop in his walk to gaze with his burning eyes upon the pallid face of his victim. Even the evidences that Marie gave of becoming a mother did not check him. He saw in that coming event, which most husbands anticipate with mingled joy and fear, only an approaching incarnation of his dishonor. He watched with a horrible refinement of suspicion for the arrival of that being in whose features he madly believed he should but too surely trace the evidences of his wife's crime.

Whether it was that these ceaseless attacks wore out her strength, or that Providence wished to add another chastening misery to her burden of wo, I dare not speculate; but it is certain that one luckless night Mr. Van Koeren learned with fury that he had become a father two months before the allotted time. During his first paroxysm of rage, on the receipt of intelligence which seemed to confirm all his previous suspicions, it was, I believe, with difficulty that he was prevented from slaying both the innocent causes of his resentment. The caution of his race and the presence of the physicians induced him, however, to put a curb upon his furious will until reflection suggested quite as criminal, if not as dangerous, a vengeance.

As soon as his poor wife had recovered from her illness, unnaturally prolonged by the delicacy of constitution induced by previous mental suffering, she was astonished to find, instead of increasing his persecutions, that her husband had changed his tactics and treated her with studied neglect. He rarely spoke to her except on occasions when the decencies of society demanded that he should address her. He avoided her presence, and no longer inhabited the same apartments. He seemed, in short, to strive as much as possible to forget her existence. But if she did not suffer from personal ill-treatment it was because a punishment more acute

was in store for her. If Mr. Van Koeren had chosen to affect to consider her beneath his vengeance, it was because his hate had taken another direction, and seemed to have derived increased intensity from the alteration. It was upon the unhappy boy, the cause of all this misery, that the father lavished a terrible hatred. Mr. Van Koeren seemed determined, that, if this child sprang from other loins than his, the mournful destiny which he forced upon him should amply avenge his own existence and the infidelity of his mother.

While the child was an infant his plan seemed to have been formed. Ignorance and neglect were the two deadly influences with which he sought to assassinate the moral nature of this boy; and his terrible campaign against the virtue of his own son was, as he grew up, carried into execution with the most consummate generalship. He gave him money, but debarred him from education. He allowed him liberty of action, but withheld advice. It was in vain that his mother, who foresaw the frightful consequences of such a training, sought in secret by every means in her power to nullify her husband's attempts. She strove in vain to seduce her son into an ambition to be educated. She beheld with horror all her agonized efforts frustrated, and saw her son and only child becoming, even in his youth, a drunkard and a libertine.

In the end it proved too much for her strength; she sickened, and went home to her sunny Belgian plains. There she lingered for a few months in a calm but rapid decay, whose calmness was broken but by the one grief; until one autumn day, when the leaves were falling from the limes, she made a little prayer for her son to the good God, and died. Vain orison! Spendthrift, gamester, libertine, and drunkard by turns, Alain Van Koeren's earthly destiny was unchangeable. The father, who should have been his guide, looked on each fresh depravity of his son with a species of grim delight. Even the death of his wronged wife had no effect upon his fatal purpose. He still permitted the young man to run blindly to destruction by the course into which he himself had led him.

As years rolled by, and Mr. Van Koeren himself approached to that time of life when he might soon expect to follow his persecuted wife, he relieved himself of the hateful presence of his son altogether. Even the link of a systematic vengeance, which had hitherto united them, was severed, and Alain was cast adrift without either money or principle. The occasion of this final separation between father and son was the marriage of the latter with a girl of humble, though honest extraction. This was a good excuse for the remorseless Van Koeren; so he availed himself of it by turning his son out of doors.

From that time forth they never met. Alain lived a life of meager dissipation, and soon died, leaving behind him one child, a daughter.

By a coincidence natural enough, Mr. Van Koeren's death followed his son's almost immediately. He died as he had lived, sternly. But those who were around his couch in his last moments mentioned some singular facts connected with the manner of his death. A few moments before he expired, he raised himself in the bed, and seemed as if conversing with some person invisible to the spectators. His lips moved as if in speech, and immediately afterward he sank back, bathed in a flood of tears. "Wrong! wrong!" he was heard to mutter, feebly; then he implored passionately the forgiveness of someone who, he said, was present. The death struggle ensued almost immediate-

ly, and in the midst of his agony he seemed wrestling for speech. All that could be heard, however, were a few broken words. "I was wrong. My—unfounded—— For God's sake look in—— You will find——" Having uttered these fragmentary sentences, he seemed to feel that the power of speech had passed away for ever. He fixed his eyes piteously on those around him, and, with a great sigh of grief, expired.

I gathered these facts from his granddaughter and Alain's daughter, Alice Van Koeren, who had been summoned by some friend to her grandfather's dying couch when it was too late. It was the first time she had seen him, and then she saw him die.

The results of Mr. Van Koeren's death were a nine days' wonder to all the merchants in New York. Beyond a small sum in the bank, and the house in which he lived, which was mortgaged for its full value, Mr. Van Koeren had died a pauper! To those who knew him and knew his affairs, this seemed inexplicable. Five or six years before his death he had retired from business with a fortune of several hundred thousand dollars. He had lived quietly since then—was known not to have speculated, and could not have gambled. The question then was, where had his wealth vanished to? Search was made in every secretary, in every bureau, for some document which might throw a light on the mysterious disposition that he had made of his property. None was found. Neither will, nor certificates of stock, nor title deeds, nor bank accounts, were anywhere discernible. Inquiries were made at the offices of companies in which Mr. Van Koeren was known to be largely interested; he had sold out his stock years ago. Real estate that had been believed to be his was found on investigation to have passed into other hands. There could be no doubt that for some years past Mr. Van Koeren had been steadily converting all his property into money, and what he had done with that money no one knew. Alice Van Koeren and her mother, who at the old gentleman's death were at first looked on as millionaires, discovered, when all was over, that they were no better off than before. It was evident that the old man, determined that one whom, though bearing his name, he believed not to be of his blood, should never inherit his wealth or any share of it, had made away with his fortune before his death—a posthumous vengeance which was the only one by which the laws of the State of New York relative to inheritance could be successfully evaded.

I TOOK a peculiar interest in the case, and even helped to make some researches for the lost property, not so much, I confess, from a spirit of general philanthropy, as from certain feelings which I experienced toward Alice Van Koeren, the heir to this invisible estate. I had long known both her and her mother, when they were living in honest poverty and earning a scanty subsistence by their own labor; Mrs. Van Koeren working as an embroideress, and Alice turning to account, as a preparatory governess, the education which her good mother, in spite of her limited means, had bestowed on her.

In a few words, then, I loved Alice Van Koeren, and was determined to make her my wife as soon as my means would allow me to support a fitting establishment. My passion had never been declared. I was content for the time with the secret consciousness of my own love, and the no less grateful certainty that Alice returned it, all unuttered as it was. I had, therefore, a double interest in pass-

ing the summer at the old Dutch villa, for I felt it to be connected somehow with Alice, and I could not forget the singular desire to inhabit it which I had so often experienced as a boy.

It was a lovely day in June when Jasper Joye and myself took up our abode in our new residence; and as we smoked our cigars on the piazza in the evening we felt for the first time the unalloyed pleasure with which a townsman breathes the pure air of the country.

The house and grounds had a quaint sort of beauty that to me was eminently pleasing. Landscape gardening, in the modern acceptation of the term, was then almost unknown in this country, and the "laying out" of the garden that surrounded our new home would doubtless have shocked Mr. Loudon, the late Mr. Downing, or Sir Thomas Dick Lauder. It was formal and artificial to the last degree. The beds were cut into long parallelograms, rigid and severe of aspect, and edged with prim rows of stiff dwarf box. The walks, of course, crossed always at right angles, and the laurel and cypress trees that grew here and there were clipped into cones, and spheres, and rhomboids. It is true that, at the time my friend and I hired the house, years of neglect had restored to this formal garden somewhat of the raggedness of nature. The box edgings were rank and wild. The clipped trees, forgetful of geometric propriety, flourished into unauthorized boughs and rebel offshoots. The walks were green with moss, and the beds of Dutch tulips, which had been planted in the shape of certain gorgeous birds, whose colors were represented by masses of blossoms, each of a single hue, had transgressed their limits, and the purple of a parrot's wings might have been seen running recklessly into the crimson of his head; while, as bulbs, however well-bred, will create other bulbs, the flower-birds of this queer old Dutch garden became in time abominably distorted in shape—flamingoes with humps, golden pheasants with legs preternaturally elongated, macaws afflicted with hydrocephalus—each species of deformity being proportioned to the rapidity with which the roots had spread in some particular direction. Still, this strange mixture of raggedness and formality, this conglomerate of nature and art, had its charms. It was pleasant to watch the struggle, as it were, between the opposing elements, and to see nature triumphing by degrees in every direction.

The house itself was pleasant and commodious. Rooms that, though not lofty, were spacious; wide windows, and cool piazzas extending over the four sides of the building; and a collection of antique carved furniture, some of which, from its elaborateness, might well have come from the chisel of Master Grinling Gibbons. There was a mantel-piece in the dining-room, with which I remember being very much struck when first I came to take possession. It was a singular and fantastical piece of carving. It was a perfect tropical garden, menagerie, and aviary, in one. Birds, beasts, and flowers were sculptured on the wood with exquisite correctness of detail, and painted with the hues of nature. The Dutch taste for color was here fully gratified. Parrots, love-birds, scarlet lories, blue-faced baboons, crocodiles, passion-flowers, tigers, Egyptian lilies, and Brazilian butterflies, were all mixed in gorgeous confusion. The artist, whoever he was, must have been an admirable naturalist, for the ease and freedom of his carving were only equaled by the wonderful accuracy with which the different animals were represented. Altogether it was one of those oddities of Dutch conception, whose strangeness was

in this instance redeemed by the excellence of the execution.

Such was the establishment that Jasper Joye and myself were to inhabit for the summer months.

"What a strange thing it was," said Jasper, as we lounged on the piazza together the night of our arrival, "that old Van Koeren's property should never have turned up!"

"It is a question with some people whether he had any at his death," I answered.

"Pshaw! every one knows that he did not or could not have lost that with which he retired from business."

"It is strange," said I, thoughtfully; "yet every possible search has been made for documents that might throw light on the mystery. I have myself sought in every quarter for traces of this lost wealth, but in vain."

"Perhaps he buried it," suggested Jasper, laughing: "if so, we may find it here in a hole one fine morning."

"I think it much more likely that he destroyed it," I replied. "You know he never could be got to believe that Alain Van Koeren was his son, and I believe him quite capable of having flung all his money into the sea in order to prevent those whom he considered not of his blood inheriting it, which they must have done under our laws."

"I am sorry that Alice did not become an heiress, both for your sake and hers. She is a charming girl."

"As to that," I answered, "it is little matter. I shall in a year or two be independent enough to marry, and can afford to let Mr. Van Koeren's cherished gold sleep wherever he has concealed it."

"Well, I'm off to bed," said Jasper, yawning. "This country air makes one sleepy early. Be on the lookout for trapdoors and all that sort of thing, old fellow. Who knows but the old chap's dollars will turn up? Good-night!"

"Good-night, Jasper!"

So we parted for the night—he to his room, which lay on the west side of the building; I to mine on the east, situated at the end of a long corridor and exactly opposite to Jasper's.

THE night was very still and warm. The clearness with which I heard the song of the katydid and the croak of the bullfrog seemed to make the silence more distinct. The air was dense and breathless, and, although longing to throw wide my windows, I dared not; for outside, the ominous trumpetings of an army of mosquitoes sounded threateningly.

I tossed on my bed oppressed with the heat; kicked the sheets into every spot where they ought not to be; turned my pillow every two minutes in the hope of finding a cool side; in short, did everything that a man does on a hot night when he can not open his window.

Suddenly, in the midst of my miseries, and when I had made up my mind to fling open the casement in spite of the legion of mosquitoes that I knew were hungrily waiting outside, I felt a continuous stream of cold air blowing upon my face. Luxurious as the sensation was, I could not help starting as I felt it. Where could this draft come from? The door was closed; so were the windows. It did not come from the direction of the fireplace, and, even if it did, the air without was too still to produce so strong a current.

I rose in my bed and gazed round the room, the whole of which, though only lit by a dim twilight, was still sufficiently visible. I thought at first it was a trick of Jasper's, who might have provided himself with a bellows or a long tube; but a careful investigation of the apartment convinced me that no one was present.

Besides, I had locked the door, and it was not likely that anyone had been concealed in the room before I entered it. It was exceedingly strange; but still the draft of cool wind blew on my face and chest, every now and then changing its direction—sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other.

I am not constitutionally nervous, and had been too long accustomed to reflect on philosophical subjects to become the prey of fear in the presence of mysterious phenomena. I had devoted much time to the investigation of what are popularly called supernatural matters, by those who have not reflected or examined sufficiently to discover that none of these apparent miracles are *super*-natural, but all, however singular, directly dependent on certain natural laws. I became speedily convinced, therefore, as I sat up in my bed peering into the dim recesses of my chamber, that this mysterious wind was the effect or forerunner of a supernatural visitation, and I mentally determined to investigate it, as it developed itself, with a philosophical calmness.

"Is anyone in this room?" I asked, as distinctly as I could. No reply; while the cool wind still swept over my cheek. I knew, in the case of Elizabeth Eslinger, who was visited by an apparition while in the Weinsberg jail, and whose singular and apparently authentic experiences were made the subject of a book by Dr. Kerner, that the manifestation of the spirit was invariably accompanied by such a breezy sensation as I now experienced. I therefore gathered my will, as it were, into a focus, and endeavored, as much as lay in my power, to put myself in accord with the disembodied spirit, if such there were, knowing that on such conditions alone would it be enabled to manifest itself to me.

Presently it seemed as if a luminous cloud was gathering in one corner of the room—a sort of dim phosphoric vapor, shadowy and ill-defined. It changed its position frequently, sometimes coming nearer and at others retreating to the furthest end of the room. As it grew intenser and more radiant, I observed a sickening and corpse-like odor diffuse itself through the chamber, and despite my anxiety to witness this phenomenon undisturbed, I could with difficulty conquer a feeling of faintness which oppressed me.

The luminous cloud now began to grow brighter and brighter as I gazed. The horrible odor of which I have spoken did not cease to oppress me, and gradually I could discover certain lines making themselves visible in the midst of this lambent radiance. These lines took the form of a human figure—a tall man, clothed in a long dressing-robe, with a pale countenance, burning eyes, and a very bold and prominent chin. At a glance I recognized the original of the picture of old Van Koeren that I had seen with Alice. My interest was now aroused to the highest point; I felt that I stood face to face with a spirit, and doubted not that I should learn the fate of the old man's mysteriously concealed wealth.

The spirit presented a very strange appearance. He himself was not luminous, except some tongues of fire that seemed to proceed from the tips of his fingers, but was completely surrounded by a thin gauze of light, so to speak, through which his outlines were visible. His head was bare, and his white hair fell in huge masses around his stern, saturnine face. As he moved on the floor, I distinctly heard a strange crackling sound, such as one hears when a substance has been overcharged with electricity. But the circumstance that seemed to me most incomprehensible connected with the ap-

parition was that Van Koeren held in both hands a curiously painted flower-pot, out of which sprang a number of the most beautiful tulips in full blossom. He seemed very uneasy and agitated, and moved about the room as if in pain, frequently bending over the pot of tulips as if to inhale their odor, then holding it out to me, seemingly in the hope of attracting my attention to it.

I was, I confess, very much puzzled. I knew that Mr. Van Koeren had in his lifetime devoted much of his leisure to the cultivation of flowers, importing from Holland the most expensive and rarest bulbs; but how this innocent fancy could trouble him after death I could not imagine. I felt assured, however, that some important reason lay at the bottom of this spectral eccentricity, and determined to fathom it if I could.

"What brings you here?" I asked audibly; directing mentally, however, at the same time, the question to the spirit with all the power of my will. He did not seem to hear me, but still kept moving uneasily about, with the crackling noise I have mentioned, and holding the pot of tulips toward me.

"It is evident," I said to myself, "that I am not sufficiently in accord with this spirit for him to make himself understood by speech. He has, therefore, recourse to symbols. The pot of tulips is a symbol. But of what?"

Thus reflecting on these things I continued to gaze upon the spirit. While observing him attentively, he approached my bedside by a rapid movement, and laid one hand on my arm. The touch was icy cold and pained me at the moment. Next morning my arm was swollen, and marked with a round blue spot. Then, passing to my bedroom-door, the spirit opened it and went out, shutting it behind him.

Catching for a moment at the idea that I was the dupe of a trick, I jumped out of bed and ran to the door. It was locked with the key on the inside, and a brass safety-bolt, which lay above the lock, shot safely home. All was as I had left it on going to bed. Yet I declare most solemnly, that, as the ghost made his exit, I not only saw the door open, but *I saw the corridor outside, and distinctly observed a large picture of William of Orange that hung just opposite to my room.* This to me was the most curious portion of the phenomena I had witnessed. Either the door had been opened by the ghost, and the resistance of physical obstacles overcome in some amazing manner—because in this case the bolts must have been replaced when the ghost was *outside* the door—or he must have had a sufficient magnetic accord with my mind to impress upon it the belief that the door was opened, and also to conjure up in my brain the vision of the corridor and the picture, features that I should have seen if the door had been opened by any ordinary physical agency.

THE next morning at breakfast I suppose my manner must have betrayed me, for Jasper said to me, after staring at me for some time, "Why, Harry Escott, what's the matter with you? You look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"So I have, Jasper."

Jasper, of course, burst into laughter, and said he'd shave my head and give me a shower-bath.

"Well, you may laugh," I answered; "but you shall see it tonight, Jasper."

He became serious in a moment—I suppose there was something earnest in my manner that convinced him that my words were not idle—and asked me to explain. I described my interview as accurately as I could.

"How did you know that it was old Van Koeren?" he asked.

"Because I have seen his picture a hundred times with Alice," I answered, "and this apparition was as like it as it was possible for a ghost to be like a miniature."

"You must not think I'm laughing at you, Harry," he continued, "but I wish you would answer this. We have all heard of ghosts—ghosts of men, women, children, dogs, horses, in fact every living animal—but hang me if ever I heard of the ghost of a flower-pot before."

"My dear Jasper, you would have heard of such things if you had studied such branches of learning. All the phenomena I witnessed last night are supportable by well-authenticated facts. The cool wind has attended the appearance of more than one ghost, and Baron Reichenbach asserts that his patients, who you know are for the most part sensitive to apparitions, invariably feel this wind when a magnet is brought close to their bodies. With regard to the flower-pot about which you make so merry, it is to me the least wonderful portion of the apparition. When a ghost is unable to find a person of sufficient receptivity, in order to communicate with him by speech it is obliged to have recourse to symbols to express its wishes. These it either creates by some mysterious power out of the surrounding atmosphere, or it impresses, by magnetic force on the mind of the person it visits, the form of the symbol it is anxious to have represented. There is an instance mentioned by Jung Stilling of a student at Brunswick, who appeared to a professor of his college, with a picture in his hands, which picture had a hole in it that the ghost thrust his head through. For a long time this symbol was a mystery; but the student was persevering, and appeared every night with his head through the picture, until at last it was discovered that, before he died, he had got some painted slides for a magic lantern from a shopkeeper in the town, which had not been paid for at his death; and when the debt had been discharged, he and his picture vanished for evermore. Now here was a symbol distinctly bearing on the question at issue. This poor student could find no better way of expressing his uneasiness at the debt for the painted slides than by thrusting his head through a picture. How he conjured up the picture I can not pretend to explain, but that it was used as a symbol is evident."

"Then you think the flower-pot of old Van Koeren is a symbol?"

"Most assuredly, the pot of tulips he held was intended to express that which he could not speak. I think it must have had some reference to his missing property, and it is our business to discover in what manner."

"Let us go and dig up all the tulip beds," said Jasper; "he may have buried his money in one of them."

I grieve to say that I assented to Jasper's proposition, and on that eventful day every tulip in that quaint old garden was ruthlessly uprooted. The gorgeous macaws, and ragged parrots, and long-legged pheasants, so cunningly formed by those brilliant flowers, were that day exterminated. Jasper and I had a regular *battue* amidst this floral preserve, and many a splendid bird fell before our unerring spades. We, however, dug in vain. No secret coffer turned up out of the deep mold of the flower-beds. We evidently were not on the right scent. Our researches for that day terminated, and Jasper and myself waited impatiently for the night.

It was arranged that Jasper should sleep in my room. I had a bed rigged up for

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THE EYRIE

WE STARTED a raging controversy among you, the readers, when we asked your advice as to whether we should keep on publishing interplanetary stories. Tales of distant worlds seem to be like fine wine to many of you, but to others they are rank poison. Otis Adelbert Kline, author of *Buccaneers of Venus,* is the focal point of the controversial storm that blows through the editorial offices of WEIRD TALES every time the postman comes with a fresh batch of mail. He is vigorously attacked by some of you, and just as vigorously defended by others. So far, Mr. Kline has more defenders than assailants; but we quote here from both sides.

"I want to register a complaint," writes William Antoni Venturini, a seventeen-year-old student of Murphy High School in Mobile, Alabama, "and after you read this letter it will in all probability receive the attention of the wastepaper basket, because it might cause not a little comment from the followers of a certain author if you were to print it in the Eyrie. Your magazine is going to the rocks; that is, if you keep printing this interplanetary rot and attempting to fool your readers into believing it is weird. If Otis ADDLEBRAIN Kline thinks he can make a reader feel weirdly horrified at the attempt of a man to rescue his bride from kidnappers, he is hopelessly doped. WEIRD TALES at this rate will be just another of those crazy 'go to the moon' magazines in a very short while. If you will just put ADDLEBRAIN and a few more hopeless nuts to work laying bricks or digging ditches, and publish one more good issue of all-weird stories, including stories by Clark Ashton Smith, Seabury Quinn, Robert E. Howard, and Paul Ernst, I think the opinion we fellers of the South formerly had of your magazine will rise to the top again."

Another slam comes from Newport, Kentucky, by a reader who neglected to sign his name: "Why doesn't Otis Adelbert Kline write a short story on the toad people part of *Buccaneers of Venus?* These Huitsenni of his are so greasy, dirty and drooling with spit that I definitely dislike reading about them—feel as if I'd fallen into a cuspidor! But the toad part sounded good, and the furry Rogo seems to promise better than this *spitty* atmosphere. Kline's characters are just puppets in this story; the ruler of the Valkars, or toad people, is the only one who struck me as real, and I greatly wanted to see what he'd do. He was an enigmatic and threatening and convincing character, and I resented being hiked away to the Huitsenni again. I don't expect every story to be tuned to my preferred wave length, but please, don't let's have so much spit in them. I need a bath after it. Robert E. Howard's *Worms of the Earth* is a story that has *everything*—vividly drawn characters—intense, sustained, powerful atmosphere—it is utterly different from anybody else's stories—perfect illusion from

first sentence to last—and he even manages to inject admiration for a character into a weird story. I definitely admire this man's passionate feeling that his subjects are his children and he's in honor bound to be loyal to them. This story is a perfect thing. It's like a champion dog in an all-breeds event. I can stack it up against stories of a wholly different breed and it still holds its own."

William M. Hoit, a high-school boy of Smithtown, New Hampshire, rushes to Mr. Kline's defense. "I find your magazine to be the best pulp-paper magazine on the market," he writes. "I read the Eyrie every month, and I find many people cast brickbats at *Buccaneers of Venus*. It is without doubt the best serial you have run. I think I can justly say this, because I have practically every volume since 1926. Next to *Buccaneers of Venus*, I think *Tam, Son of the Tiger*, was your best story. Don't let any 'crank' tell you to omit this type of story, because I think the majority of people who read your magazine like the serials of Kline, etc."

"Continuing the interplanetary controversy," writes Julius Schwartz, of New York City, "if the stories maintain the high quality that WEIRD TALES has been featuring the past few years, and contain a new angle, idea, or something original to make them unique, I'll be perfectly content to see interplanetary yarns continued in WT."

C. W. Meyers, of Indianapolis, writes to the Eyrie: "Although I have read every issue of WEIRD TALES since August, 1926, when I first became acquainted with your truly wonderful magazine, this is my first letter to the Eyrie. I read only two magazines: WEIRD TALES and the MAGIC CARPET. They contain just the kind of stories I like. The contents are widely varied. I heartily approve of WEIRD TALES as it is, and hope that you will continue to print a goodly number of Edmond Hamilton's and Otis Adelbert Kline's type of fiction, as well as the more strictly weird tales of Quinn, Howard, Dyalhis, and others. You could not possibly improve WEIRD TALES."

"Keep the magazine weird," writes Llon P. Rees, of Toronto, Canada. "Refuse all serials. The atmosphere can not be recaptured from month to month. Your best effects are cumulative; from the level of everyday affairs up to the shuddery horror of the revealed secret. This effort of your genius-writers is punctured by the hiatus of the 'to be continued' policy. Only a hidebound policy of taking *Frankenstein* and other old stories at the value placed on them by their contemporaries can explain your fulsome flattery of Edgar Allan Poe and others. I give all honor to these pioneers, but they are eclipsed by superior writers in every issue of your magazine."

Writes Walter W. Miller, of Madison, Wisconsin: "Boy, it sure is hard which story to place first in the March number. But for weird effects on a person, I think *The Isle of the Torturers* is the weirdest I have ever read. For second choice I pick *The Tower of the Elephant;* and I think *Buccaneers of Venus* takes third place. I have never written to the Eyrie before, but I want to let you know that I think you ought to keep on having interplanetary stories, not all the time, but every once in a while. I liked *Buccaneers of Venus* very much. And also the Conan stories by Howard—I sure get a kick out of that swashbuckling soldier of fortune. The fearless way he does things grips one right up to the end of the story."

"Mr. Kline has again triumphed in his novel of that cloud-wrapped planet Venus," writes Jack Darrow, of Chicago. "Weird adventures and excitement galore. But is it

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Coming Next Month

A LOW mutter of voices roused the girl. Opening her eyes, she saw that the fire was burning low. Conan still sat on the boulder, and close beside him crouched another figure. The girl drowsily made out a hooked beak of a nose, a glittering bead of an eye, under a white turban. The man was speaking rapidly.

"Let Bel wither my arm! I speak truth! I am a prince of liars, Conan, but I do not lie to an old comrade. I saw Natohk; with the others I knelt before him when he made incantations. But I did not thrust my nose in the sand as the rest did. I am a thief of Shumir, and my sight is keener than a weasel's. I squinted up and saw his veil blowing in the wind. It blew aside, and I saw—I saw—Bel aid me, Conan, I say I *saw!* My blood froze in my veins and my hair stood up. What I had seen burned my soul like a red-hot iron. I could not rest until I had made sure.

"Whence came Natohk?" rose the thief's vibrant whisper. "Out of the desert on a night when the world was blind and wild with mad clouds driven in frenzied flight across the shuddering stars. Vampires were abroad that night, witches rode naked on the wind, and werewolves howled across the wilderness. On a black camel he came, riding like the wind, and an unholy fire played about him. When Natohk dismounted, the beast swept into the night and vanished. And I have talked with tribesmen who swore that it suddenly spread gigantic wings and rushed upward into the clouds, leaving a trail of darkness behind it. No man has seen that camel since that night, but a black, brutish, man-like shape shambles to Natohk's tent and gibbers to him in the blackness before dawn. I tell you, Conan, Natohk is—look, I will show you an image of what I saw that day by Shushan when the wind blew aside his veil!" . . .

This mighty story of the wizard Natohk, and a barbarian mercenary who was called upon to save a nation from shuddersome evil, will be printed complete in next month's WEIRD TALES:

BLACK COLOSSUS

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

GENIUS LOCI

By Clark Ashton Smith

The story of a deathly horror that lurked in the scummy pool in the meadow where old Chapman had been found dead.

THE CRAWLING CURSE

By Hugh B. Cave

A shuddersome tale of a cold-blooded murder in the East Indies, and the ghastly retribution that dogged the murderer to his doom.

THE IRON MAN

By Paul Ernst

A powerful weird-scientific story of a huge robot, thirty feet in height, that ran amuck in the city streets, leaving terror and dreadful death in its wake.

THE DWELLERS IN THE HOUSE

By Sophie Wenzel Ellis

A different story—the tale of Ahmad Yazij, the evil Arabian who changed bodies at will and perpetuated his ego throughout the ages.

June WEIRD TALES Out May 1

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 666)

not possible to cut your long serials to not more than five parts? *The Thing in the Fog* is the most eery of the past few de Grandin tales. Werewolf stories are always weird things anyway, and this one is a good example. *Akkar's Moth* is a creepy tale indeed. I hope to see more of Harold Ward in our magazine, especially after reading *Germs of Death.*"

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue of WEIRD TALES? Seabury Quinn's werewolf tale, *The Thing in the Fog,* is in an exact tie with Robert E. Howard's fantastic yarn, *The Tower of the Elephant,* for first place among the stories in our March number as this issue of the magazine goes to press.

As we announced last month, fifty-two radio dramatizations—one each week—of stories that have thrilled you in WEIRD TALES will be broadcast nationally. These stories have been skilfully adapted by Oliver Drake, playwright and scenario writer, and will retain all their thrill when you hear them on the air. We give you here the casts of the first three broadcasts: First broadcast—*The Living Dead,* adapted from Kirk Mashburn's shuddery vampire novelette, *De Brignac's Lady,* will include in its cast William Farnum, Viola Dana, Jason Robards, Richard Tucker, John Ince and Wally Reid, Jr. Second broadcast—*The Curse of Nagana,* adapted from Hugh B. Cave's shivery tale, *The Ghoul Gallery,* will include Richard Carle, Johnny Harron, Florence Britton, Cyril Delavante, John Ince, Pierre White and Lucille Anaya. Third broadcast—*The Three from the Tomb,* by Edmond Hamilton, will include William Farnum, Priscilla Dean, Bert Roach, Pat O'Malley, John Ince, Frank Glendon and Robert Hoover. Watch your local newspaper for announcements of this entertaining series of broadcasts.

My favorite stories in the May WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)----------	Why?----------
(2)----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

The Pot of Tulips

(Continued from page 664).

him near my own, and I was to have the additional assistance of his senses in the investigation of the phenomena that we so confidently expected to appear.

THE night came. We retired to our respective couches, after carefully bolting the doors, and subjecting the entire apartment to the strictest scrutiny, rendering it totally impossible that a secret entrance should exist unknown to us. We then put out the lights, and awaited the apparition.

We did not remain in suspense long. About twenty minutes after we retired to bed, Jasper called out, "Harry, I feel the cool wind!"

"So do I," I answered, for at that moment a light breeze seemed to play across my temples.

"Look, look, Harry!" continued Jasper in a tone of painful eagerness, "I see a light—there in the corner!"

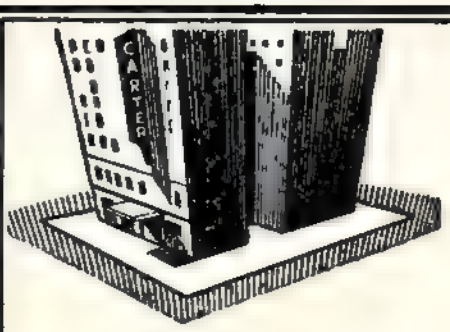
It was the phantom. As before, the luminous cloud appeared to gather in the room, growing more and more intense each minute. Presently the dark lines mapped themselves out, as it were, in the midst of this pale, radiant vapor, and there stood Mr. Van Koeren, ghastly and mournful as ever, with the pot of tulips in his hands.

"Do you see it?" I asked Jasper.

"My God! yes," said Jasper, in a low voice. "How terrible he looks!"

"Can you speak to me, tonight?" I said, addressing the apparition, and again concentrating my will upon my question. "If so, unburden yourself. We will assist you, if we can."

There was no reply. The ghost preserved the same sad, impassive counte-



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nance; he had heard me not. He seemed in great distress on this occasion, moving up and down and holding out the pot of tulips imploringly toward me, each motion of his being accompanied by the crackling noise and the corpse-like odor. I felt sorely troubled myself to see this poor spirit torn by an endless grief—so anxious to communicate to me what lay on his soul, and yet debarred by some occult power from the privilege.

"Why, Harry," cried Jasper after a silence, during which we both watched the motions of the ghost intently, "why, Harry, my boy, there are *two* of them!"

Astonished by his words, I looked around, and became immediately aware of the presence of a second luminous cloud, in the midst of which I could distinctly trace the figure of a pale but lovely woman. I needed no second glance to assure me that it was the unfortunate wife of Van Koeren.

"It is his wife, Jasper," I replied; "I recognize her, as I have recognized her husband, by the portrait."

"How sad she looks!" exclaimed Jasper in a low voice.

She did indeed look sad. Her face, pale and mournful, did not, however, seem convulsed with sorrow, as was her husband's. She seemed to be oppressed with a calm grief, and gazed with a look of interest that was painful in its intensity, on Van Koeren. It struck me, from his air, that, though she saw him, he did not see her. His whole attention was concentrated on the pot of tulips, while Mrs. Van Koeren, who floated at an elevation of about three feet from the floor, and thus overtopped her husband, seemed equally absorbed in the contemplation of his slightest movement. Occasionally she would turn her eyes on me, as if to call my attention to her companion, and then, returning, gaze on him with a sad, womanly, half-eager smile, that to me was inexpressibly mournful.

There was something exceedingly touching in this strange sight—these two spirits so near, yet so distant—the sinful husband torn with grief and weighed down with some terrible secret, and so blinded by the grossness of his being as to be unable to see the wife-angel who was watching over him; while she, forgetting all her wrongs, and attracted to earth by perhaps the same human sympathies, watched from a greater spiritual height, and with a tender interest, the struggles of her suffering spouse.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Jasper, jumping from his bed, "I know what it means now."

"What does it mean?" I asked, as eager to know as he was to communicate.

"Well, that flower-pot that the old chap is holding——"

"Well, what of that flower-pot?"

"Observe the pattern. It has two handles made of red snakes, whose tails twist round the top and form a rim. It contains tulips of three colors—yellow, red and purple."

"I see all that as well as you do. Let us have the solution."

"Well, Harry, my boy! don't you remember that there is just such a flower-pot, tulips, snakes and all, carved on the queer old painted mantel-piece in the dining-room."

"So there is!" and a gleam of hope shot across my brain, and my heart beat quicker.

"Now as sure as you are alive, Harry, the old fellow has concealed something important behind that mantel-piece."

Actuated by the same impulse, and without another word, we both sprang out of bed and lit a candle. The apparitions, if they remained, were no longer visible in the light. Hastily throwing on

some clothes, we rushed downstairs to the dining-room, determined to have the old mantel-piece down without loss of time. We had scarce entered the room when we felt the cool wind blowing on our faces.

"Jasper," said I, "they are here!"

"Well," answered Jasper, "that only confirms my suspicions that we are on the right track this time. Let us go to work. See! here's the pot of tulips."

This pot of tulips occupied the center of the mantel-piece, and served as a nucleus round which all the fantastic animals sculptured elsewhere might be said to gather. It was carved on a species of raised shield, or boss, of wood, that projected some inches beyond the plane of the remainder of the mantel-piece. The pot itself was painted a brick color. The snakes were of bronze color, gilt, and the tulips—yellow, red, and purple—were painted after nature with the most exquisite accuracy.

FOR some time Jasper and myself tugged away at this projection without any avail. We were convinced that it was a movable panel of some kind, but yet were totally unable to move it. Suddenly it struck me that we had not yet twisted it. I immediately proceeded to apply all my strength, and after a few seconds of vigorous exertion I had the satisfaction of finding it move slowly round. After giving it half a dozen turns, to my astonishment the long upper panel of the mantel-piece fell out toward us, apparently on concealed hinges. Within were several square cavities sunk in the wall, and lined with wood. In once of these was a bundle of papers.

We seized these papers with avidity, and hastily glanced over them. They proved to be documents vouching for property to the amount of several hundred thousand dollars, invested in the name of

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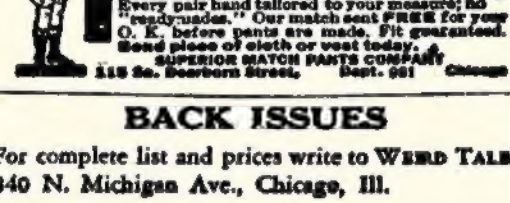

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Mr. Van Koeren in a certain firm at Bremen, who, no doubt, thought by this time that the money would remain unclaimed for ever. The desires of these poor troubled spirits were accomplished. Justice to the child had been given through the instrumentality of the erring father.

The formulas necessary to prove Alice and her mother sole heirs to Mr. Van Koeren's estate were briefly gone through, and the poor governess passed suddenly from the task of teaching stupid children to the envied position of a great heiress. I had ample reason afterward for thinking that her heart did not change with her fortunes.

That Mr. Van Koeren became aware of his wife's innocence, just before he died, I have no doubt. How this was manifested I can not of course say, but I think it highly probable that his poor wife herself was enabled at the critical moment of dissolution, when the link that binds body and soul together is attenuated to the last thread, to put herself in accord with her unhappy husband. Hence his sudden starting up in his bed, his apparent conversation with some invisible being, and his fragmentary disclosures, too broken, however, to be comprehended.

The question of apparitions has been so often discussed that I feel no inclination to enter here upon the truth or fallacy of the ghostly theory. I myself believe in ghosts. Alice—my wife—believes in them firmly; and if it suited me to do so I could overwhelm you with a scientific theory of my own on the subject, reconciling ghosts and natural phenomena.

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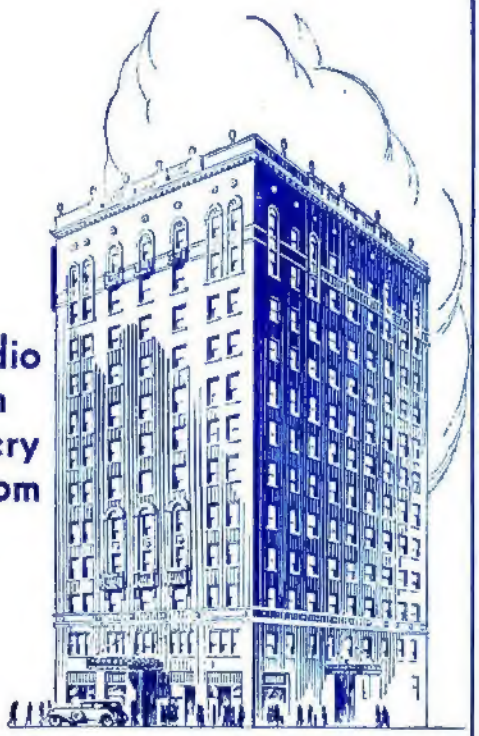

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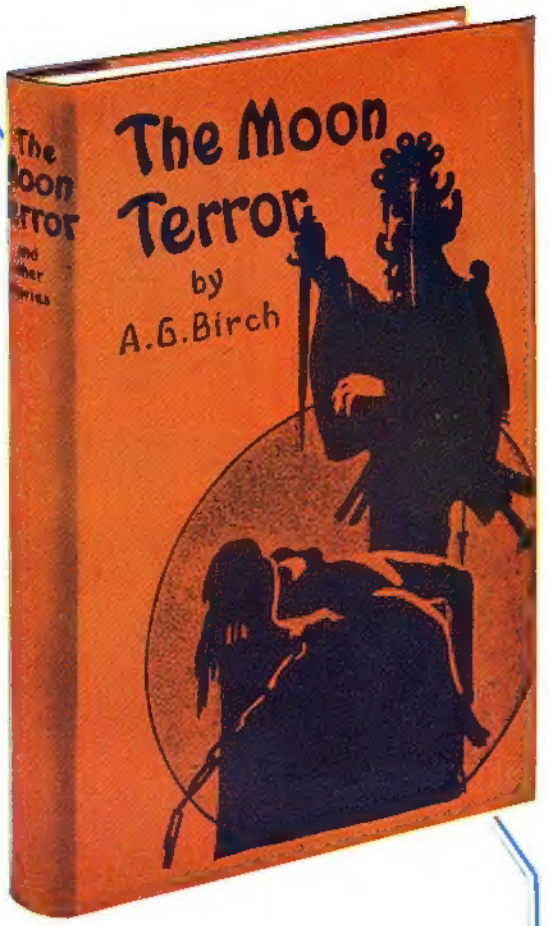

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